AUNT SERENA

BLANCHE WILLIS HOWARD

AUTHOR OF

"ONE SUMMER"

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BY

BLANCHE WILLIS (HOWARD) von Teuffel

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"Be strong, live happy, and love"

BOSTON
JAMES R. OSGOOD AND COMPANY
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"Not through arrogant pride
Or over-boldness fail they who strive
To tell what they have heard,
With voice too weak for such high message."

WITHDRAWN

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AUNT SERENA.

CHAPTER I.

'And the spring was in my life,
And I was glad."

WILLIAM MORRIS.

"Her somewhat narrow forehead braided tight,
As if for taming accidental thoughts
From possible pulses."

MRS. BROWNING.

THE only chair in Miss Weatherstone's little sewing-room was at this moment occupied by Miss Weatherstone herself. This was a palpable disadvantage for Rose, who, in consequence, was compelled to stand before her accuser and judge like a naughty child, a delinquent housemaid, or a culprit of some other description.

How well she knew the little room. "The Den" was the short and significant name which she and Harold had given it in those far-off delicious days, when their first plunges into literature had revealed to them giant, witch, and dragon, and they had peopled the homely orchard, the bird-house on its slender pole, the dusky branches of the stalwart oaks,

even the unsuspecting phlegmatic duck-pond, with fabulous beings of earth, air, and sea. But not the most thrilling vision of a child-devouring, flame-snorting monster could ever produce, in the hearts of these loving, lawless comrades, such agonies of horror and despair as the thought of a certain pale, still, remorseless woman, stitching in her low chair by the sunny window of the Den.

During the seventeen years of Rose's existence, she had been summoned with lamentable frequency before this dread tribunal, and had listened to reprimand, exhortation, and warning, all of a somewhat scathing nature, in precisely the position in which she found herself to-day. She had indeed accepted these oft-recurring scenes more or less as a matter of course, like thunder-storms and wintry winds and other natural phenomena which could temporarily interfere with her childish pleasures, but which were, upon the whole, not fatal.

To-day there was a change. The same clock ticked in the impressive silence which always preceded Miss Weatherstone's orations; the same portrait of grandmamma Weatherstone, in severest profile, hung on the wall. But still, there was a change, Rose thought. She did not seek to define it. She felt it simply. She was older. The early summer had come full of beauty and promise unspeakable, and in her warm young heart found full response.

She had galloped down the long grass-grown lane, jumped the chattering, slender brook, then come

slowly through the wood, listening to the birds, talking deliciously caressing nonsense to her horse, rejoicing with a keen delight in the wood-scents and wood-sounds, the trembling lights and shades, the rosy twin-flowers along the way, herself as full of the glow and stir of nature as any blossom of them all. The fair, vague hopefulness of June was in the child's heart. Like June, she was glad in her youth and strength, and full of eager wonder at the beautiful life about her. Her sensitive soul quivered like the tender leaves of the young alders she lightly touched with her whip as she passed. Her sweet, tumultuous thoughts soared as high as the wood-bird's flight, and, like it, lost themselves in far-off clouds.

And now here was the Den, and aunt Weatherstone preparing the heads of her discourse. Rose, feeling the need of exterior aid to enable her to meet the enemy on equal ground, glanced about, seeking a place whereon to rest a nonchalant elbow. But no mantlepiece or high chair-back was there to support her in the coming ordeal. The little room was devoid of superfluous furniture. Only Miss Weatherstone in her low chair by the open sunny window, and on the floor a great prosaic basket of unfinished work. All was as it had been through the years. Yet never before had the sober old orchard overflowed with such a wonderful foamy sea of blossoms, never had the bobolink in his cage sung so daring and triumphant a note. Even the familiar well-sweep wore an audacious expression, pointing up

suggestively to the free blue sky; while the silent woman in the corner looked colder, harder, more pinched, more exasperating than ever. She finished her seam, and smoothed it, slowly drawing her thumb-nail with a rasping sound the whole length of the linen. Rose felt a certain sympathy with it. It must be uncomfortable. Any thing must suffer under aunt Harriet's thumb. The girl flushed, and tapped her foot impatiently with her riding-whip. How long was she to be summoned to this chamber of torture? When was a girl "grown up" if not at seventeen? Rank rebellion entered her soul; and, committing what Miss Weatherstone considered an unpardonable sin, she opened fire.

"What did you wish to say to me, aunt Harriet?" she asked quietly. "You sent for me; and I came at once."

Miss Weatherstone slowly raised her eyes, and looked at Rose from head to foot. Miss Weatherstone's glance was not usually considered genial and reassuring. A woman, meeting it, would often involuntarily raise her hand to adjust perfectly orderly hair-pins, or brush imaginary dust from her sleeve. Brave men, well-seasoned men of the world, had been known to feel extremely ill at ease in her presence; while shy ones were apt to drop their hats, stumble over footstools, and tangle the threads of their conversation in inextricable confusion before the steady gaze of this small, quiet woman.

To-day her dreaded glance had without doubt

enough to prey upon. Rose was flushed from her ride, and the wayward morning breezes and the sunshine, while indignation lent a still deeper glow to her warm young cheeks. A mutinous lock strayed over her left shoulder. A green twig had taken up its lawless abode on the rolling rim of her hat. A rent of noble dimensions displayed itself freely in the front of her riding-skirt. She had dismounted in the woods, and easily regained the saddle by means of a gnarled stump; but something caught, and there was an ominous sound of tearing. It was of no consequence, she thought; but how curious that something always did catch on the way to aunt Harriet's, when more than at any other time one needed to look irreproachable. And now tradition and force of habit were too strong for her. In spite of her courage, she felt conscious of that rent as if it were a sin upon her soul. Already the bobolink's note had grown languid; the sea of orchard-blossoms, no longer rising and falling in rosy waves, was a pale, motionless mass. But she rallied. Why should she be discomfited by a frozen glance? Was she to be put in a dark closet to meditate upon her misdemeanors, as if it were ten years ago? Again she charged gallantly.

"What do you wish to say to me, aunt Harriet?" she went on recklessly. "If it's nothing, after all, I think I'll run away again. Aloha is impatient. The flies trouble him."

"Rosamond," remarked Miss Weatherstone dryly, "I am at a loss to know where you get your strange

infatuation for horses. Certainly not from our family. Grandmamma Weatherstone always did so dislike a horsey girl."

"Infatuation, not for horses, but for a horse," laughed Rose. "I am true to Aloha. Your grandmamma Weatherstone might have liked him, too, if she could have ridden him; but he probably would have thrown her. He is very unexpected in his ways now and then," she added in a matter-of-fact tone.

This irreverent picture of the pride of the family kissing the dust was distasteful in the extreme to her descendant, who was said to strongly resemble her. Indeed, in an undeviating severity of judgment, — which she was wont to call uprightness, — in a preternaturally sharp perception of the mote in her sister's eye, in an utter inability to comprehend the great, sweet gladness of youth, and its lovely, faint echoes in later years, in a certain frosty condescension she was apt to extend to those who permitted themselves to be patronized, — and what woman of this description was ever without her little court? — and in the delicate aquiline curve of the handsome nose, she was the counterpart of her deceased grandmother, whose manners and maxims she quoted upon all occasions. "Grandmamma was a Beaconswold of Boston, you know," she would say to her satellites, in her dry, monotonous voice. "The Peter Beaconswold family, not the James. I am said to have the Beaconswold nose," raising her handkerchief, and lightly dusting it off with a defer-

ence delightful to observe. No devotee ever approached a sacred relic more reverently than Miss Weatherstone her aristocratic Beaconswold feature. There were two other points of resemblance between these two daughters of one race. Although one had been the mother of a large family, and the other at the ripe age of sixty was still a spinster, both were born old maids; and though, according to the immutable decree of nature, they were undoubtedly once infants, it is no less true that neither of them was ever young.

"There are various things I want to say to you, Rosamond," Miss Weatherstone went on with her oppressive air of infallibility. "If Serena Lennox doesn't know what is fitting for you, happily I do."

"I wish you would please leave aunt Serena out of the conversation," said Rose quickly.

"That I shall not do, as I consider her chiefly responsible for your undignified ways. For a woman of her years, her conduct towards you is amazingly weak, I may well say culpable."

"What has she ever done except love me dearly, and be an angel to me ever since mamma died?" said Rose hotly.

"It is to what she has not done that I object," Miss Weatherstone dryly remarked. "Among other things, she has not taught you to control your temper."

Rose looked down gravely, then smiled. "She does not know I have one to control. I don't think I have ever had any at home, at least, since I was

ten years old, and John drowned my kittens. Then I was furious. But I always do seem to discover it here," she added wickedly. Then, repenting, she said with childlike grace, "I beg your pardon, aunt Harriet. I suppose I am a great disappointment to you. If you will tell me what I have done that is bad, and not say any thing about dear aunt Serena, I will be very good, and listen quietly."

"You have, as I said, undignified ways, Rosamond," went on the inflexible judge, unmoved by the tender youth of her victim, or the sweet, appealing voice. "You are uncurbed. One feels like reading the Riot Act over you, and ordering you to disperse."

Rose opened wondering eyes. "Am I like a great, turbulent mob?" she thought.

"You are conspicuous. To be conspicuous is to be unladylike. You are different from other girls. People look at you. When you enter a room, people know it. You never pass unperceived, as others do. The fault lies in you. A girl of your age should be unobtrusive, unseen."

At this catalogue of her iniquities, Rose felt puzzled. "That is what I am, it seems," she said; "but what do I do that is wrong?"

"It is your whole bearing, your air, yourself. I have been watching you closely. You are continually doing objectionable things. You were seen talking and laughing with a stranger yesterday. What have you to say to that?"

"Aunt Harriet! He merely asked me if Judge

Edmond's place was on the river-road, or not. He was obliged to ask somebody, and I was the nearest person. I stood by the schoolhouse-door. All the little Kindergarten children came tumbling out. Aunt Serena was speaking with old Miss Simpson. He probably thought me an overgrown child, — and he was really quite old," she added triumphantly. "His hair was not exactly gray, but grayish."

"I do not say that you should not have answered him," remarked Miss Weatherstone in a judicial manner. "But why did you laugh? Why could you not have answered with dignity?"

"I simply said he must go by the river-road; and then Pet Edmonds rushed forward, and seized his hand, and said she would take him to her papa's; and Jack grew red in the face, and said he was the boy, and he ought to: the gentleman walked off with both of them quarrelling about him. He was quite grave, but his eyes twinkled. Jack was eating taffy, and his hand looked brown and sticky; but he insisted upon clasping the gentleman's glove nevertheless. I laughed because the children were so comical. What is a strange man to me?" she said with great simplicity and quiet.

"You need not have laughed. Your manner was undignified. You have no repose. There was never a Beaconswold without repose."

Miss Weatherstone's voice sounded as if she were reading maxims from a book, with rigid observance of the marks of punctuation. She kept her voice up

at her commas, and stopped long enough to count four at her periods.

Rose, ill at ease, conscious of injustice somewhere, yet generous enough to feel she must be more or less at fault, or such things could not be said to her, made a poor attempt at conciliation.

"But I am not even an insignificant fraction of a Beaconswold, aunt Harriet," she said gently.

"More's the pity," returned Miss Weatherstone. "Beaconswold and lady are synonymous."

"I don't like to have you say that. I cannot believe it is so bad as that!" Rose irrelevantly exclaimed with a vague distress on her face.

"I say what I think," said Miss Weatherstone coldly. "It is plainly my duty to tell you that you lack restraint, repression. May I inquire what you have done in the last six months but scour the country on that crazy horse of yours? And usually, I regret to say, alone, without even John."

"Why, I've read hours and hours every day!"

"Yes, novels and poetry," sneered her aunt.

"But such novels and such poetry!" cried Rose, warming with her subject. "George Eliot and William Morris and" —

"I am not interested in your list, Rosamond. Do not trouble yourself to repeat it."

"But I've finished four volumes of Macaulay, too," announced the young girl with much satisfaction. "And as to my riding alone, you know, aunt Harriet, that poor old John would break his neck if he should try to follow me. He is so much happier

pottering in the garden. And why should I not ride alone in this little drowsy place, where indeed, wherever I go, I am usually on your land or aunt Serena's, and everybody knows me?"

"Because it's improper. All that you do is distinctively improper. Grandmamma Weatherstone would have been simply appalled at the way Serena Lennox has brought you up."

This was too much. The girl's eyes flashed, and she said hastily, —

"Aunt Weatherstone, I have always wanted to tell you that I think your grandmamma Beaconswold-Weatherstone must have been an extremely disagreeable old woman; and I don't believe dear aunt Serena would have minded in the least any thing such a person might have said or thought."

Miss Weatherstone folded her work, and laid it in the basket, folded her slender hands, and laid them in her lap. This meant war to the knife.

Rose went on passionately, "And I don't think I do any thing papa and mamma would have disapproved of. Aunt Serena says I do not. You always make me so uncomfortable and conscious. Do you call it well bred to be conscious? What is the real matter with me? What don't you like? I know what it all means, aunt Harriet. You don't like *me*," she said squarely.

"I cannot say that I find your nature congenial, Rosamond," remarked the older woman in her measured accents.

"But I am my nature!" returned the girl impetu-

ously. "And why have I not the right to be myself? See!" and she pointed out the window with a little impassioned gesture, "it all makes me glad, wild with joy. A morning like this, and my feet scarcely touch the ground. But it is that which you don't like," she said, with unconscious acuteness. "Is it wrong to be so glad as I, when the world is so beautiful — so beautiful?" she repeated dreamily; and the well-sweep pointed significantly towards distant hazy heights.

Miss Weatherstone looked at her with singular disapproval.

"What on earth has all this to do with the subject? I merely make a well-timed suggestion as to your manners, and you find it necessary to put in a plea for your existence, in your exaggerated dramatic fashion. Really, Rosamond, you are most unpleasantly demonstrative. You grow more like your mother every day."

"Ah!" cried Rose, with a low, intense note of pain and expostulation, the color and eagerness fading from her face. Then she said solemnly, "I would rather be like mamma than like any one else who ever lived."

There was silence in the little room. Did Miss Weatherstone feel that she had gone too far? She quietly took up her work again, and after some moments said, as she deliberately threaded her needle, —

"After this exhibition I presume it is useless to tell you my especial reason for sending for you to-

day. But I will still give you the chance. I wish to be just. As you are aware, I have always looked upon you and Harold as joint heirs of the Weatherstone estate; but, as you also know, the matter lies wholly in my hands."

Rose's manner had repose enough now. She was looking at her aunt gravely and somewhat absently.

"Nothing has been kept secret from you. You know, too, very well, my wish in regard to yourself and Harold."

Rose gave a little start, and was about to speak, but checked herself.

"And you have always known, that, while your father, for sentimental reasons of his own, wished Serena Lennox to have the direction of you as a child, you would be allowed when older to choose between us. I therefore now propose, since I strongly disapprove of your present training, or rather total absence of training, that you place yourself under my guidance, and give me the opportunity of at least attempting to make you what you ought to be, to enter upon the duties that would devolve upon you with this property. I should not object to your seeing your aunt Serena at proper intervals, but"—

"I leave her, and come here to live with you!" exclaimed the astonished girl, with unflattering emphasis.

"That is what I said. Otherwise the property"—

"The property" had no more meaning for Rose than any word in an unknown tongue, except that she had found the early May-flowers in the prop-

erty's woods, climbed the property's trees, waded in the property's brooks, and otherwise enjoyed the property's advantages all her life. The one thing that touched her was the absurdity of talking about seeing aunt Serena at proper intervals.

"I could not live anywhere without her," she said simply. "You must know that I could not."

A moment's silence. Miss Weatherstone cut her thread with a curious snap, like a grim old fate.

"Then there is nothing more to say, except that you need not come here any more, Rosamond."

"Do you mean I am not to come here at all?" asked Rose in wide-eyed wonder.

"Yes," said Miss Weatherstone, rising. She stood beside her niece, and the two looked directly at each other. The older woman was the shorter. The girl turned grieved eyes full of questioning upon the impassive face before her, then, —

"I am sorry," she faltered, and without another word left the room.

Harriet Weatherstone heard her call her horse, "Aloha! come, Aloha!" and in a moment saw her riding slowly down the avenue. What was this curious sensation? An impulse to call that retreating figure back? Impossible. Miss Weatherstone never experienced any thing so ungenteel as an impulse, and she had done her duty to Rosamond. The girl was hot-tempered, ungrateful, and obstinate. Still, she watched the lightly swaying figure out of sight. How slowly she was riding away. Aloha! Idiotic name for a horse.

The Beaconswold feature looked a trifle more pinched that day, the lips beneath it thinner than ever, and Solomon's virtuous woman could by no means have watched her handmaids so narrowly.

"How fast Miss Harriet do age, to be sure," remarked the cook of twenty years' standing, to the gardener. "And she's just that particklar like!"

Miss Weatherstone was not an imaginative person; yet many times that day she seemed to see a figure vanishing beneath the drooping elms, and more than once she heard the fresh, young call, "Aloha! Aloha!" clear as a bird-note echoing through the still air: and the day grew cloudy and dull.

Something had gone out of her life. She remembered that Rose had looked at the last singularly like her father. She shivered. "These evenings are cool for the season," she said, drawing a prim little three-cornered gray shawl over her shoulders.

CHAPTER II.

„Mein ſtolzes Roß, mein treues Roß,
Dir klage ich all mein Leid."

"Blessing she is; God made her so:
And deeds of week-day holiness
Fall from her noiseless as the snow;
Nor hath she ever chanced to know
That aught were easier than to bless."

LOWELL.

ROSE rode slowly through the woods, listless, drooping, and grieved to the heart. She gave Aloha loose rein; and he, indulging in no playful pranks as was his wont, walked along in a subdued and sympathetic manner highly commendable in an animal of his exuberant spirit. "We must consider this matter thoughtfully," was the language of his sagacious eyes. Rose stopped in a favorite nook, where a monarch of the forest lay low across the path, and a tiny brook, half hidden by tall ferns, ceaselessly sang his requiem. There was quiet here. — the stillness that can best soothe a restless heart She sprang lightly down, and then, because she was a child, and hurt, wept her childish, passionate tears; and because a child clings to something it loves, for the mere comfort of the clinging, she flung her slender arms round Aloha's glossy neck, and sobbed

aloud, and — O shade of grandmamma Beaconswold-Weatherstone! — actually kissed his satin skin, murmuring many fond and foolish names.

Aloha pricked up his ears. Some one was approaching. Rose, absorbed in her griefs, her cheek pressed close against her horse, saw no vigilant ears, heard no footstep on the other side of the brook. A grave face looked through the trees towards the slight, sobbing figure in its attitude of unrestrained grief.

"She too!" thought the stranger. "The happy little girl I saw yesterday, sobbing her very heart away in the solitude of the woods. Poor child! Why do you weep so bitterly? Have you, too, found out that your doll is stuffed with sawdust?"

He was strongly moved to part the dense undergrowth where he was standing, step across the thread-like brooklet, put a fatherly hand on her shoulder, and ask gently," —

"What is the matter, little girl? Don't cry so. It's really not worth while."

"She would not thank me. I should only startle and displease her."

Yet he lingered long enough to mark the slight, supple figure in its abandonment, the delicate profile against the bowed neck of the powerful black horse, the fallen lock of reddish chestnut hair lying on her shoulder and glistening like bronze in the sunshine, even the rent in her simple blue habit, while flickering lights played lovingly over her, and a bird above called his mate in one long, thrilling note.

"Child! Young fresh heart! Sob out your grief and be comforted. If we world-worn souls could do the same, the dull, weary pain might not last so long." And smiling half kindly, half bitterly, he went on; and only Aloha knew that some one had passed.

His ears relaxed. He drooped his head, with protection and indulgence in his mien.

"We must have this out, and then we'll feel better," said the soul that looked out of his deep, wise eyes.

"You blessed Aloha, you love, you dear!" said the girl softly. "They do not try to make you pretend that you are a lap-dog or a cat, or any thing nature never meant you to be."

"I should think not," said the proud arch of Aloha's neck. "Lap-dog, indeed!"

"They don't blame you because you are not a plodding cart-horse. They leave you free, hero that you are. And you need only associate with me, the person you love best. Now, suppose they should try to make you sing like a nightingale, or crawl like a lizard, or run up a tree like a monkey, — you'd hate it, and be wretched, would you not?" She smiled through her tears, pleased with her reasoning.

Aloha responded by a look of imperturbable dignity.

"No? You'd not be wretched?" The tears still trembling on her lashes, she stepped back for a better view of her comrade.

"Would you be above caring for them? You

would make concessions, yes. Even now you let little me curb your strength and restrain your flying feet; but if they should wish to make you a frightened, foolish thing, instead of your bold, brave self, what then, my beauty?"

Was it only a fish leaping in the brook, was it a rustling in the willows on the other bank, or a squirrel in the branches above, or why did Aloha, at this instant, interrupt his young mistress's eloquence by giving a mighty plunge? and why did he then stand with ears erect, eyes on the alert, proud nostrils dilated, slender forelegs firm and motionless as marble, and poised, as if the suspicion of a bond would send him bounding through space?

To the eager soul awaiting auguries, auguries always come. Will one go to the East? Then all the tall reeds and rushes bend eastwards; and the many voices of the night-breeze murmur only, "To the East, to the East!" Will one hasten to the South? Then the birds and the clouds and the butterflies and the thistle-down float southwards; and every wave sighs, "The South!" as it breaks on the sands at one's feet.

The girl's face flushed. He means he would fly away, far, far away. What else told me the same story to-day? Why, the old well-sweep. It cannot go itself; so it points and points, with its long arm. But, Aloha, I can go! I will go!

"Aloha!" The horse turned, and came soberly back to her, repenting of his momentary excitement.

"You would run away from them, but not from

me," she said, gravely. "I know you only did it to show me, my dear; but one mustn't even *seem* to turn from one's friends."

She scrambled into her saddle as best she could. She did not spring lightly from the ground to a height equal to her own, after the approved fashion of the heroines of novels when obliged to mount without assistance, and would no doubt have found this gymnastic feat difficult, if not impossible, as would most girls not specially trained for the acrobatic profession.

Then, with resolve and hope shining out of her sweet young face, she rode brightly away.

"I will have a good trot on the river-road, that I may not take home foolish red eyelids to distress aunt Serena. And I will mature my plans. Conspirators always mature their plans. Come, Aloha! Like a bird, now, my beauty!"

On she went, following the widening brook, till Aloha's hoofs sounded on the little bridge that crossed it lower down. Some one stood there, idly watching the water. He turned, and took off his hat as she rode swiftly by. Absorbed in her thoughts, she was not conscious of his greeting until it was too late to acknowledge it; and the fleeting remembrance that he was the person who had been the subject of the Edmonds children's contention, yielded to the more important matters occupying her mind.

"Ah, my pretty little maid-in-a-mist! Does your sun shine so soon?"

He watched her, with a somewhat amused smile, till she turned off on another road and disappeared.

"A lovely child, and a spirited rider. I must ask Edmonds who she is."

But as he and Judge Edmonds chatted over their wine that evening, and then gradually advanced to business and law-papers, the little episode of the morning passed from his memory; and dry documents shut out the tender vision of a girl's wet, wistful eyes.

Meanwhile Rosamond had her trot, and came home radiant, but with a certain restlessness quivering about her lips. Would aunt Serena, or would she not? That was the question.

"Where is Miss Lennox?" she asked, as she rode past what was once a porter's lodge, but was now occupied by the gardener, porter, and groom, all in one, — John, the ancient servitor, who dropped his hoe to take Aloha's bridle, as she quickly dismounted.

"If she ain't a-doin' the sweet pease, she's at the glories, Miss Rosamond," remarked John, with dignity; "an' if she ain't at the glories, she's a-takin' of a promenade in the garding somewheres."

Rose glanced hastily in the low, wide-open windows as she passed the irregular, pretty, roomy cottage, almost stooping under its heavy mantle of woodbine, and looking, with its curious wings added here and there in whimsical, irrelevant fashion, as if the house itself had developed a vine-like propen-

sity for straggling over the ground, rather than that its owners had been responsible for such unaccountable wanderings.

In the broad, middle walk, between her sweet pease and morning glories, aunt Serena was walking up and down with her gentle, deliberate step. She turned as she heard Rose's rapid footfall, giving her a loving smile, and at the same time the quick, keen glance with which she habitually met her darling. "Is it well with thee?" asked the faithful eyes after every absence. "Fairy god-mother," Rose often called her aunt; and there was indeed a quaint, rare charm in the small, slightly bowed figure, the softly waving white hair, the large, brown eyes so tenderly humorous, so sad and so wise. Even her frail hands had a dainty grace of their own; and her whole presence diffused the benign and subtle influences of old-time courtesy, the repose of a beautiful spirit, and the freshness of feeling and innocence of instinct commonly attributed only to youth.

The tall girl put her two arms around her aunt.

"Fairy god-mother, do you love me?"

"You have something to tell me, and something to ask me, have you not, my dear?"

"O wisest of women, I have. Auntie, you are as wise as the three Nornes together; for you know the past, present, and future all at once."

"But you always have something to tell and to ask, child."

"Then let your magic reveal what it is at this moment. Oh! there are strange things in the air,

murmurings and whisperings and beckonings, and even dumb things have spoken."

"They often speak," said Miss Lennox, smiling. "But I need no special incantation to divine at least a part of your marvellous morning. Aunt Weatherstone was trying, and my Rose showed her thorns."

Rose kissed her aunt's hands in grave acknowledgment, then retorted gayly, —

"But I really do not know the exact amount of deference due to unpleasant relatives, particularly when they are only one's father's half-sister, and have aggravating Beaconswold features."

"Dear child, does it help matters to be"—

"Flippant? Yes, for if I make silly jokes they may keep silly tears out of my eyes. I don't wish to accuse her unjustly when she isn't here to defend herself; but — there — you know what she is yourself!" exclaimed Rose, with a desperate struggle between her wish to please one aunt, and an unholy inclination to give the other one her deserts.

"Yes, I know, certainly," answered Miss Lennox very gravely. "Who better?"

"And indeed I tried not to be bad this morning, but nothing was right. First Aloha received her condemnation, then my uncouth ways, and then you, as responsible for all my misdemeanors."

"Ah?" and Miss Lennox smiled, with no shade of resentment on her quiet face.

"I was not a very pleasing object, as you see;" and Rose ruefully lifted her skirt, and smoothed the gaping rent with solicitude; then, letting the heavy

folds fall as they would, she went on rapidly, "But I came in full of the morning, and she was so quiet and cold and still, it was torture to be in her presence. She has that dreadful way of never believing in you, and never making any allowance for accidents. She looked at me as if I had pulled down my hair and torn my habit out of pure disrespect to her. Oh, she does make me bad! I should grow to be a criminal of the deepest dye if I should live with her! I should be a Lucretia Borgia — a Messalina — a "—

"And then, my dear?" asked Miss Lennox, reaching up and taking off Rose's hat, relieving it of its twigs, gently patting it into shape. Her hand, as it passed, lingered on the girl's cheek: its light, tender touch quieted her.

"And then?" she repeated. "Not much to tell. I hardly know. I looked out into the free world, and loved it. I looked at her, and could not love her. The very way her hair grows on her temples irritates me. She said I was too much like mamma. She said something about Harold, — the old story, you know; then at last she said she wished me to come to her, see you at proper intervals, — proper intervals, do you hear, auntie? — be guided by her, and learn how to be a lady!"

"Was that all?" inquired Miss Lennox placidly.

"I believe she said something about the estate, but I was too angry to listen. I lost my temper, and caught it, like a ball in the air, all the time

she was speaking. I did have one satisfaction. I told her grandmamma Weatherstone must have been an uncommonly disagreeable old woman; and when I said it, the fetters of years seemed to drop from my soul. It rose, and stretched its wings."

"Oh, child, child!" remonstrated Miss Lennox, with a perceptible twinkle in her eyes.

"And aunt Serena," Rose hesitated, played with her whip, gathered up her riding-skirt and let it fall again, turned, pulled a sweet pea and closely exam ined its tiny crimson veins — "the end of it all is, — she has forbidden me the house."

Miss Lennox gave a slight start, and looked off towards the belt of sentinel-like oaks which encircled the little estate. Gazing up into the tree-tops, she saw them not. She was looking back into the days of her youth, seeing faces long since vanished, hearing voices forever hushed.

"So bitter! Is she still so bitter?" she murmured, then turned to Rose. Lovely and warm as the sunshine, sensitive, full of response, variable on the surface because of her many girlish moods, but brave and steadfast at heart, and still looking with such large, wondering child-eyes at life, how could one of her own kin be cruel to her!"

"My *dear*," was all the little old lady said, but with a world of tenderness.

Quick, hot tears filled the girl's eyes. She went on rapidly, —

"I don't know why it hurt me so. I certainly don't love aunt Harriet enough to care whether I

ever see her again, or the old house either; but still, it seemed to take a part of my life away from me. And to be ordered out of her sight, out of papa's old home, was like a curse. She is a cruel, cruel woman!"

Miss Lennox sat down in a rustic garden-chair, leaned her head against its high back, and turned her pale, pained face away from Rose.

Then she began slowly, —

"It was not a curse, Rosamond. It was only disappointment. You can well afford to forgive her for her harshness, because life is beautiful to you, and hers is dreary and desolate. You do not even need to be generous to forgive her. I cannot say that I have not found her unlovely. But she has been a disappointed woman all her days; and no one has ever loved her, although she has ruled many by force of her strong, imperious nature. There is much I could tell you, but you are too young."

"Oh, tell me!" pleaded Rose, kneeling at her aunt's feet, resting her suddenly laughing face on her arms like a Raphael cherub. "You can't mean there was ever such a thing as a romance in aunt Harriet's life? Was she ever *in love?*" asked the girl, amused and incredulous. "Did she, aunt Harriet Weatherstone, ever actually want any one to love her, — man, woman, or child?"

"Dear, every one wants to be loved. At least it seems so to me; though I don't always feel sure of my own theories, I have made so many mistakes," Miss Lennox replied in her thoughtful way.

"You don't set yourself up on the cross-roads of life, like a great, human sign-post, to tell everybody where to go; but you are always right nevertheless," cried loyal little Rose.

Her aunt smiled, and continued mildly expounding her theories. "I think we all crave love, whether we know it or not, and whatever perverse method we adopt to wound it, to drive it away, to tread it under our feet, to bar and bolt the strong doors of our hearts against its pleading face and outstretched hands."

"Even aunt Harriet?" asked Rose demurely.

"Even aunt Harriet. Why, my dear, once I knew an elderly woman, reared in the straitest sect of New-England Puritanism. In her family no child received a good-night kiss, no bright, gracious ways illumined the colorless routine of daily life. And suddenly a strange chance sent to her care a little child, of her name and race it is true, yet farther from her in the sweet, sunny influences of its birth than the distant clime where it was born. It was an enchanting, spirited little being, who had known only the incense and adoration offered at the baby's altar in every happy home. The little four-year-old waif was brought in late at night, after a long journey, and placed on the knee of this woman, whom even her undemonstrative family thought austere. Was the child's instinct duller, or keener, than it seemed? She blinked at the lights, stared at the strange people and the strange room, then, with the divine smile of a cherub, so sure was she of love,

turned her back upon it all as if to shut out the strangeness, threw her soft arms round the neck of her new guardian, nestled close to the prim breast, leaving her queer little open-mouthed, baby kisses wherever her dewy lips touched the old, unlovely throat, and, with a drowsy coo, murmured, 'Milly's sleepy. Poo' Milly! Put Milly to bed.'"

"And what did old Miss Prim do?" asked Rose. "Aunt Harriet would have said, in her most didactic manner, 'Children should never be sleepy until they are told to be,' and frightened the poor little dear into convulsions."

"She said nothing, and showed nothing of what she felt. She merely rose mechanically; and her hands, unused to such tender work, laid the little thing in its bed. She did not melt much outwardly, that night or afterwards. It is chiefly in books and on the stage that people reform perceptibly on account of so slight a thing as the touch of a child's hand. After sixty years of crustiness, however sound people's feelings are at the root, they don't begin to blossom like the rose. But the child won, and love won. Many a time I have seen her, in later years, pat her cousin's shoulder affectionately, throw her arm round the angular figure, and give it a little girlish hug; and though she never received any actual response other than 'Don't be foolish, Mildred,' often indeed an awkward, half shy look, as the only answer to a caress, still, the girl won. Her loving, laughing, dauntless ways ruled the silent house. When her fearless hand smoothed that with-

ered cheek, a suffused look in the faded eyes above it was the equivalent of a flush of joy in a youthful face. And don't you suppose the older woman sorrowed silently that she had been trained in too stern a school to be able to learn, so late, love's gracious, kindly ways? I am sure she did. Ah! if we only knew how to batter down the fortifications round seemingly hard old hearts, we should not always find them enemies."

"I don't believe any amount of battering would help matters much with aunt Harriet," remarked Rose wickedly. "Now, wasn't I an enchanting child, and wasn't I sleepy often enough, and hungry too? But I never moved her ossified sensibilities."

"Rose, dear, you were a loving, daring child. You ought to have won. You would have won, if I had not been there. You see, I have always been an annoyance to her; and her life has been one continual disappointment. She was reared in a hard, rigid fashion; then, the man for whom she cared, who perhaps might have made her life sweeter and richer, happened to care for some one else." There was an almost imperceptible tremor in the gentle voice, then a pause. "After that, her young brother, to whom, in her way, she was attached, fell in love with my little sister, and married her. This was the worst of all; since, as you know, the Weatherstones and the Lennoxes have always been the Montagues and Capulets of Northbrooke," and on the little lady's lips played her fine, humorous smile: "but for my part it seems to me too absurd for two

old maids, in two more or less shabby old houses, to try to perpetuate the foolish quarrels of a couple of hot-headed men nearly a century ago. Old Miss Capulet is, I confess, a mean-spirited person, and has frequently asked old Miss Montague to tea; but Miss Montague has proper pride, and wishes to preserve the ancient traditions."

"Dear, blessed, little Miss Serena Capulet," said Rose softly.

"And, finally, you are like your mamma; and then, you love me. Every thing has gone against her will, and her will is adamant; so for years she has been"—

"Petrifying!" put in Rose with emphasis.

"How can she help it?" said Miss Lennox meditatively. "I fear I am less orthodox than Mr. Lathrop might wish, but can she soften? I am sorry for her. But can Maitland's cliff transform itself into rich meadow-land? Perhaps," she mused, "in the long, mysterious processes of nature"—

"Oh, but we cannot wait for them: life is not long enough!" exclaimed Rose impetuously. "And why need we live under the shadow of the cliff? This is what I wanted to beg of you. Take me away from here and from her, far, far away!" she entreated, still kneeling, her head thrown back, her eager eyes full of pleading.

"Where do you want to go, Rosamond?" asked Miss Lennox slowly, not without a certain pained surprise in her voice. She had reached an age when change of any kind is unwelcome, and she

loved her home. "Where?" She looked lovingly at her soft lawns, her cottage, and her old oaks. Already they seemed fading from her view.

"As far from here as I can go," said Rose with the unconscious cruelty of youth. Springing to her feet, and standing straight and lithe as a young Indian, she exclaimed, "Across the sea, wherever papa and mamma went when they were so young and happy, like two children wandering hand in hand through pleasant places, as you have so often said. I always wanted to go, but there seemed to be no reason; and I know you love it here. But to-day every thing bids me go. Every thing points far away into the great world beyond these quiet hills."

"Your mother used to talk so years ago," said Miss Lennox thoughtfully. "It is strange to hear you now. I was always a bird that loved the nest; but Winifred was bold and brave like you, dear, and longed to soar away:" she looked wistfully at the eager child.

"I will never soar away from you, dear little fairy godmother," cried the girl warmly; "and if you would be unhappy"—she hesitated.

"I shall not be unhappy," returned Miss Lennox, quietly accepting the journey, and already seeing the silent house standing with closed shutters in the midst of winter's snows, already wondering how John would manage without her, already choking down her first homesickness.

When did a young heart ever understand an old

one? Rose's glad eyes met her aunt's serene, tender gaze; yet these two near and dear ones were wide apart at the moment. One saw snowy summits, and famed rivers winding down to distant southern seas, cathedrals and castles, dusky ruins and gliding gondolas, and heard the music of foreign tongues. The other saw a pale, sweet face, with great, mournful eyes, and heard, "I am not afraid, Serena; but how can I leave my poor little baby-girl?" She was always a child herself, little Winifred; and Rosamond was so like her. How fast the years had flown since the little sister died, and Rosamond was seventeen yesterday! Well, she should have her flight, her prancings, and caracolings. Why not? Every spirited young thing loves action. As for Harriet Weatherstone, what she has said, she has said. Perhaps it would be really the wisest thing to take Rose out of her sight for a time.

"If only I may guard you aright," she said, "my bonny bird that wants to fly. The world is so large, and I am only a frail old woman." She sighed as she looked into the girl's fearless, tender eyes; and her own grew moist with memories and apprehension.

"Come, child, let us go in now, let us go in," she said, a little wearily.

CHAPTER III.

"Let us strike hands as hearty friends,
No more, no less: and friendship's good;
Only don't keep in view ulterior ends,
And points not understood,

In open treaty. Rise above
Quibbles and shuffling off and on.
Here's friendship for you, if you like; but love—
No, thank you, John."

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

EVERYBODY in Northbrooke soon knew that Serena Lennox and Rosamond Wellesley were going to Europe. Miss Lennox was amiable enough to announce her intention at once, being aware that nothing was so irritating to Northbrooke as a secret. Northbrooke did not like to be surprised. It claimed as its inalienable right a fair amount of leisure in which to discuss everybody's plans before they were put in execution. Out of regard, then, for the idiosyncrasies of her neighbors, Miss Lennox made no secret of her intentions. Why, indeed, should she be reticent in this respect? In the old days there had been nothing surprising in a Wellesley or a Lennox passing a winter in Paris or Rome, but of late they had all grown rusty. That comes of being an old woman and living alone, thought aunt Serena, cheering herself on to this step which, look at it as

she would, always assumed gigantic proportions. There was positively no reason why Rosamond should vegetate in Northbrooke. If a dull old woman like herself enjoyed vegetating, why, that was pure indolence. Rosamond should be happy, God bless her! and with an inward shudder Miss Lennox wrote to engage their passage, and began active preparations for departure.

There were several old pensioners to be provided for, various business arrangements to make; and John, who regarded the matter with mournful and undisguised disapproval, reported each day some newly discovered necessity of repairs on the house, all of which would occupy some weeks.

Miss Lennox wrote a civil note acquainting Miss Weatherstone with the new plans, and hoping that they would meet with her approval. To this there was no answer. One day between Northbrooke and the city, where Miss Lennox and Rosamond had been making farewell visits, they met the Weatherstone carriage, and in it Miss Weatherstone herself, sitting aggressively erect. She passed them and their modest phaeton as if they and it were thin air, not turning her head, but simply looking at them with eyes that saw not.

Rose flushed with vexation. "Ridiculous old creature!" said she. But Miss Lennox's soft "Poor, lonely soul, hard to others, harder to herself!" followed quickly. "I would go again to see her. Don't ride Aloha. Go quietly on foot or drive. Yes, dear, I wish it," she went on, as Rose looked

rebellious. "Perhaps she will receive you. It will only cost you the sacrifice of a little unworthy pride. The happy owe something to the unhappy in this world; and she is unhappy, God knows." And Rose did not dream that the gentle soul had suffered, in her far-off girlhood, a grievous wrong at the hands of this woman, of whom she always spoke with tender compassion.

The days flew softly by. The roses still lingered; and long lines of lilies were now shining out in their white stateliness, filling the air with fragrance. Miss Lennox lingered lovingly over her flowers, flitting about in her dainty fashion, and ministering to their needs as if they were human friends. The old place seemed very dear to Rose, too, as the time for leaving it approached; yet the joy of the unknown had taken possession of her waking or dreaming. One would have thought it was a new and glorious world which the girl was going forth to conquer, or that she had found the gateway to Paradise, she had such a radiant, glowing face, and such a happy light in her eyes that seemed to see more beauty than was revealed to others.

Now this, if charming in itself, was not necessarily agreeable to everybody; and perhaps next to old John, the person who disliked the "flitting" most heartily was Harold Thornton. Like John, he regarded it with aversion and resentment, entertaining the secret conviction that there was a great and special injustice to him in the obnoxious proceeding. However pretty Rose might be, gazing into bound-

less space with a rapt look in her large eyes, it did not give him the slightest satisfaction. He much preferred that she should confine her attention to a not uncomely youth near at hand. One morning he ventured to express his views to this effect, and indeed made a few other remarks of a more or less personal and important nature. To one of which he received this cheerful reply: —

"Five, at least, cousin Harold. I do not at present see the necessity of having any at all. But if I take one, I must certainly take five."

Harold listened with the sombre dignity of a youth of nineteen, who imagines himself madly in love, and who finds the object of his affections inclined to be frivolous instead of responsive. He slashed savagely at bush, weed, and wild-flower with his riding-whip.

Rose was sitting at the top of a rather crazy flight of stone steps leading down the steep, high bank overgrown with tangled shrubbery and wild-cherry trees. Harold stood a little below her, his back turned to the pretty cove. But the girl looked past him, her smiling eyes watching the familiar scene. The waves creeping softly up among the tall reeds and coarse sea-grasses, the little village on the hillside at the left, the bold lighthouse tower far to the right, and the shores curving to meet the long bridge which seemed to draw them nearer. A heavy train of cars was lumbering over it, throwing loose pennons of smoke to the morning breeze. A few birds were skimming idly about. How quiet and monotonous it was; but she liked it.

She was an aggravating picture in her morning freshness, as she turned her cool, undrooping gaze from the lake-like water to the somewhat flushed young person before her.

"Don't be cross, Harold," she said sweetly. "I prefer having no such encumbrance, you understand. But if it were an inevitable evil, five would be more agreeable to me than one."

"I must be uncommonly obtuse," he remarked grimly; "but I confess I fail to appreciate the joke."

"It's not a joke, you dear boy. It is my most serious conclusion, after listening to you with the utmost attention. For instance, one like aunt Serena's banker, urbane and gray-haired, to whom I would casually mention from time to time that I wanted gloves and chocolate. One fond of society, concerts, the opera, and dancing; one for rainy days at home, instructive, but not pedantic, learned, amiable, and witty; one to tease and be very fond of. You'd do for that one, Harold, if you would not quarrel with the other four." Harold muttered something inaudible and improper. "And one to revere and quite adore. He is my favorite. You find him in a great many books. He has suffered. I am not his first love, you know. He had loved before we met. There are moments when he is unconscious of my presence. He is lost in reveries of scenes of long ago. That must be delightful. He can be dark or fair; but his eyes must be deep set, and his smile melancholy and rare."

"I think I will go," Harold said abruptly. He had stopped decapitating flowers, and was looking Rose full in the face, not sullenly, as before, but with a curiously observant expression.

"Are you angry?" said she gently.

"I don't know what I am. A fool, perhaps. But I think I'll go all the same."

She rose; and they walked slowly up the long garden-path towards the pleasant, old-fashioned house resting peacefully among its orchards, lanes, and gardens, with its shady entrance-drive, and its double belt of giant oaks completely encircling the little domain. Like a line of stalwart sentinels guarding the sweet old homestead, the little girl who grew up there used to think. No intruder would dare molest the first violets and anemones in the knoll where they grew so beautiful in the long, damp grass; no one could approach her duck-pond with malign intent while that stately guard stood there. What the oaks would actually do in case of nocturnal attack, did not occur to her. Her faith in them was inspired by the proud way they had of holding their branches out against the sky.

They walked silently up the broad old garden on its sunny slope towards the bank. Then Rose suddenly stopped, and looked back along the path. Through the gap in the overgrown rough hedge, where they had been at the top of the steps, she could see the glistening water and the lighthouse and a bit of the bridge. She could not see enough that morning of what she had seen all her life; yet

her glance was keen and clear, not softly lingering. At length she turned the same direct, intense gaze upon her companion, and observed, that, while her home smiled back at her as it had ever done in summer sunshine, the boy at her side gave no smile, no word or look indeed, but with a certain haughtiness of mien, and a quietly resolute face, silently accompanied her.

"You are not really angry, Harold? And we go so soon."

"I am not angry, but I have had a revelation. You are less good than I thought."

She flushed slightly, but smiled. "I have always told you that. Curious that you believe it now for the first time."

"Because to-day for the first time I have cause. You are not even kind to-day."

"What do you mean?" she asked rather coldly.

"You do not treat me fairly," he continued in the same quiet voice. "You have always been fair and brave before. Even when you were little you never whimpered, and begged for mercy in any game, like the other girls. You were as plucky and downright as we fellows. I always knew what you meant, and where to find you; and now I do not. I do not think you are playing with me, though they say all girls like that well enough — but" — here the boy flushed deep all over his honest face.

"Harold!" exclaimed Rose indignantly.

"I beg your pardon. You know I do not mean that, but you hurt me. Why do you laugh, and

give me only nonsense in return, when I offer you, if not much indeed, yet at least all I have, all I am, and all I hope to be?"

Rose hesitated, looking at him gravely, then pointed, with a slow gesture, to a large and singularly-grown tree in the corner of the garden.

"Cousin Harold, it was not three years ago, hardly more than two, that I climbed that tree to the very top!" and her triumphant, laughing face looked into his, as if this at least was unanswerable.

He smiled in spite of himself, but said stoutly, —

"You can climb it at twenty-five, for all of me." Then, with a certain shyness, "I should like you to always do what you like, Rosamond."

The girl grew grave. Twenty-five? Yes, she would be twenty-five sometime. One could not always remain a little girl, "with all her happy world so near the ground," let one try ever so hard. Perhaps girls ought not to joke about such things. In books they did not joke. But then, in books it wasn't Harold. That surely made a great difference. She looked at him questioningly. The gloom on his bright, young face was painful to her. She had never seen him like this. Perhaps she ought to be solemn too. Perhaps, at seventeen — she ought — but dear, dear, what an inconvenient, what a contradictory age it was! She was not old enough to escape aunt Weatherstone's reprimands. She was not young enough to be free from Harold's annoying attentions. She stopped suddenly among the lilies.

Her merry, kobold mood had passed. She felt depressed. She was conscious of a little selfish regret that Harold had disturbed her. Why need he? she thought with impatience, and a certain sense of helplessness. It was all so pleasant. Why need he change it? But the boy's earnest eyes met hers squarely; and he waited, masterful even in his disappointment, determined to compel her to accord him a more satisfying and tangible response.

Her womanliness conquered. She gave a little trembling sigh, and, with it, left the fair fields of childhood, where she would fain have lingered still. With timid and reluctant step she set out upon unknown ground. The path might lead to an enchanted land, to a larger life; but she knew she was turning away forever from something very pure and sweet, and her heart was full as she spoke, —

"Harold," stretching both hands towards him in her impetuous fashion, "forgive me. I am selfish. I did not wish to wound you. I only wanted to keep what has been. I want no change between us; and when you speak as you have spoken this morning, it puts you so far away."

"If I only knew how to make it bring me nearer!" exclaimed the boy. "I know we're young and all that; but you are going off, and when I think of all the other fellows you'll see over there" — and he scowled as if he longed to massacre the whole male population of Europe, and as if he saw it kneeling in distracted rows before a simple little

girl in a morning-gown and a garden-hat. "Tell me one thing, Rose; and you won't be vexed that I ask, will you? Were you thinking of anybody in particular when you were chaffing about that fellow with the rare and melancholy smile? — confound him!" He began shyly with a steady crescendo to his final vigorous imprecation.

No child of six could have looked up with more innocent, wondering eyes than Rose at this moment.

"Well, I can't help it," said Harold in a shame-faced way. "I liked him well enough, you know. I can't say I did not. I must admit he's a very good fellow;" and his natural honesty forced him to give the stranger his due. "I can't say he tries to do Lara or Werther, or any other of that disgusting tribe that's always enjoying the luxury of woe. He tells a good story, and makes a good joke, and eats his dinner like a man; but still, you know, his eyes are deep-set, and he doesn't smile much, and he's just the sort of man a romantic girl might" —

"I'm not a romantic girl," exclaimed Rose with spirit; "but I really think you are trying to make one of me. I don't know in the least what you mean. It is really too much, Harold. I never wish to see your Lara-Werther man, or indeed any man at all. I am going to beg aunt Serena to take me where there are no men, — not even school-boys," she added maliciously.

"Then, you'll have to go to a place like that college in Tennyson's 'Princess,'" remarked Harold with his most mature air, growing good-humored as

Rose grew vexed; "only it didn't seem to turn out exactly after the original intention, did it? But I really thought you might have met Mr. Bruce. He was out here at Judge Edmonds's."

"I believe I did see him," said Rose carelessly. "It is possible. If he is the person I imagine, this is the second time I am indebted to him for reproaches from my near relatives." She was very thoughtful now, her broad, white eyelids drooping over somewhat troubled eyes. Of what was she thinking?

"I am still waiting for my answer, Rose," Harold said gently.

"And I will give it, since you force me to speak of things I have never thought of in connection with myself." She was pale and grave and steadfast. Why was she suddenly so white? She was like the tall, slender lily just behind her, thought the boy. How pretty her throat was! Did girls always have such fair throats? She was hanging her head now quite like the lily. Now she lifted it high and looked at him.

"Forgive me if I do not say it right. These things are too strange for me to try to explain them. I'm sure it is all a great mistake, Harold. You are sorry I am going. That makes you think you love me. And neither you nor I know what love is. But it must be something very grand and sweet and sad" — and the quick, shy color swept over her face, up to the blue vein in her temple, upon which Harold's eyes were fixed. "Some day you'll come

to me and say, 'I have found my love and my wife,' — and then you will be older and calmer and stronger. To-day we are so like the little boy and girl who have climbed the gnarled apple-trees in the orchard, and fed the ducks, and ridden the shaggy pony bareback, and jumped on the hay. We are a little longer than we were then," and she smiled up at the well-built boy, "but not much wiser I think. College has not really changed you much, and I have had nothing to change me. I know we are 'grown up,'" she said regretfully. "It is such a pity. But if aunt Serena should call this moment, 'Come, children. I have spread your bread and butter with marmalade,' it would seem more natural to me than for you and me to be talking about these strange, deep things. Aunt Harriet spoke to me the other day about you, and" —

"Old beast!" exclaimed Harold. "You know I would never insult you by mentioning her name in the matter. As if a worthless bit of pasture-land need be continually harped upon. I'd thank her to allow me to manage my own affairs. It is, perhaps, my misfortune that I have such an ally" —

"My dear," said Rose gently, "there is no misfortune for you or for me. We are only wandering beyond our depth, using words whose meaning we do not know. But we are good old friends, and dare to be honest with each other; so we shall soon find firm ground under our feet. Listen, Harold. We are going away from the old place, out into the great world, and I am eager to go: but I love the

old life and am coming back to it; and I want to find it unchanged, my oaks and my waves and my lilies and my birds, and most of all my brave boy. O Harold, let us not even try to bring any thing new into our lives. We are so young, and indeed we are not ready. Let us remain little children towards each other, trusty, loving little hearts as of old. You frighten me when you say wife. Take the word back. Please say you do not mean it," she implored.

"How strange you are, Rosamond. How do you know all this?" and Harold saw her soft, wet eyes, and clasped, eloquent hands, and wondered at the pleading voice.

"I know so little, but I feel so much; and I cannot bear any thing unreal to disturb us. You have learned it out of books or college talk, that you want me to be your wife; and I feel it is not true. Take it back, — and let me go from my home with my heart at rest, the happy child you have always known. We are not ready. Love is divine. We must not take its sacred name in vain."

"You lovely little girl, you know I will do any thing in the world you ask of me. There is no one like you, Rose, — no one; and it's a mighty poor business, — your going. Just try it yourself, and see how it is. You don't know what it is to be a fellow like me, and come galloping through the grove, and see a little white figure, with a long, bright mane, standing on the lawn, and waiting for you, as I've seen you all these years. And as

for getting it out of books, that's rubbish, and you know it. I suppose I'm a good deal of a cub, but I'm man enough for this: to love you well enough not to want to pain you. So I'll eat my words, and lie down in the path, and let you walk over me, if you say so."

"And you take it back?" said Rose, with gentle insistence.

"Yes, for to-day, if that is your fancy. But I have not promised not to say it again as many times as I wish, and" —

"That you take it back is all I wish to know."

"And if you expect me to stay here for you to find when you come back, like your oaks and your waves and your lilies, you are very much mistaken," remarked Harold, in his imperious, boyish way. "I don't intend to become a feature in this landscape by any means, and if you stay too long I shall come after you. As soon as I am through college nothing will prevent me."

"Why, come then, you funny boy," said Rose, laughing. "Aunt Serena and I would like nothing better. Let us go in now to her."

Side by side they went up the steps to the broad piazza, and passed through the open, vine-wreathed window into the room where aunt Serena's sweet, wise eyes looked at the two and understood; but she only said, —

"Children, I've been waiting for you;" and her diminutive figure stood before Harold, and the big, strong boy looked down upon the tender, humorous

face, and the gentle hand holding out a small silver salver, on which was a tiny old-fashioned glass of her favorite Greek wine, with a bit of cake of marvellous richness, such as is produced in old New-England families from mysterious and well-guarded recipes handed down like heirlooms from one generation to another.

"Before your ride home, dear boy," she said, kindly proffering her nectar.

"Only the wine, then, thank you," said Harold; "and though I need no inward fortifying for that small journey, I drink to your safe return. You think I'm that same old boy beneath whose roundabout was an appetite that never slumbered or slept, don't you, aunt Serena? You forget we are all grown now, and are less hungry and less happy;" and the disappointed boy tried to smile, and bear himself right manfully.

"You are always my dear boy, Harold, whom I love next to this child here, and to whom I shall bring cakes and good things many a long year, and see him eat them too," said the old lady cheerily. "It is the imperial cake, Harold," she added significantly.

But Harold's wound was not to be healed, even with imperial cake. He only said, —

"I must say good-by, the real good-by, here in the old house, aunt Serena; though I shall, of course, be at the station to-morrow. And then he tried to thank her for her loveliness to him, but choked and trembled, and, in spite of his nineteen

years, made but a sorry speech. Aunt Serena kissed him and blessed him; and Rose said good-by with a sweet, moved face.

He gulped down a mighty sob, and rushed out of the house; and his horse's hoofs in a moment more were clattering down the shady drive. His mother's guests at dinner that evening found him a morose and uninteresting young person. Before his eyes were two women. One with a fair young face, and one with a fair old face. One was tall and strong and supple, the other frail and bowed: both looked kindly at him, and bade him a long farewell. "I will follow them soon," he resolved.

As he rode down the grove, "Poor boy!" said the old lady: "he has a warm heart, — but it could not be. I am sorry it came between you."

"Nothing has come between us," said Rose with composure. "At least, he took it all back."

"Took it back!" exclaimed aunt Serena.

"Yes," said the girl simply. I begged him to, and he did," as if making an offer of marriage and retracting it all in one morning were a thing of daily occurrence. "It's quite the same now as if he had never said it. Dear old boy. I shall miss him. He is such a dear when he isn't sentimental."

Aunt Serena smiled, and shook her head, thinking, "She is only a child with all her cleverness, — only a child still; but when her turn comes, then we shall see something different."

CHAPTER IV.

"Where shall we land you, sweet?
On fields of strange men's feet,
Or fields near home?
Or where the fire-flowers blow,
Or where the flowers of snow,
Or flowers of foam?"

SWINBURNE.

IN August our pilgrims sailed for Germany. Curiously enough Rose had no longing for England. She said one day, as they were lazily discussing their route, "We must go there of course, — afterwards. England is beautiful, but one half knows it all. Now, I want to go where I shall understand neither the language nor the ways, and where things will be entirely strange. I am sure England will be too homelike and respectable. Ah! if we could only begin with Egypt!"

"Or South Africa," sighed Miss Lennox, "where there would be still greater possibilities of strangeness." But she heroically abandoned her lingering hope that Rose might enjoy a quiet, comfortable stay in the revered land of her forefathers; and while she could not force herself to feel the wild thirst for novelty and adventure which seemed to be consuming her niece, at least the girl's extravagancies met with indulgence if not with encouragement. "It is

Rose's own journey, — Rose's flight out into the world," she reasoned. "She shall go where she will, and she shall not find me a weight on her neck."

England having been promptly vetoed, France was proposed with enthusiasm by Rosamond. Now, Miss Lennox had a simple, old-fashioned notion that France was "wicked." She could not have told why, but she looked aghast when this fair land was mentioned as the very gateway to their foreign wanderings; and they finally compromised the matter by cordially agreeing upon Germany.

"I am sure I shall like Germany," said Miss Lennox cheerfully, but with extremely vague ideas of what they two were going to do over there.

"Like it? I shall adore it!" exclaimed Rose. "I am glad that I never studied a word of German. We shall have so many more experiences."

The conversations which took place previous to their departure, in the shady porch of the old cottage, would have excited pity, if not contempt, in the mind of the practical tourist. There was no studying of maps, no apportioning of time, no delirious cramming of geographical and historical facts. In spite of Miss Lennox's inherent distrust of any kind of nomadic life, and although Rose was over-charged with eagerness to her very finger-tips, there was still a great restfulness in their way of contemplating the journey. It may have been somewhat "American;" it may have been peculiar to themselves that two women, inexperienced travellers, without even the

feeble protection of a maid, should have embarked upon the "Aspasia," knowing nothing of their course except the name of the city to which she was bound, and should have felt themselves prepared, with perfect tranquillity of mind, to spend an indefinite time in unknown places. Yet their beautiful confidence in the goodness of their fellow-creatures met with no betrayal. At least, wherever the two came in all their journeyings, civility and kindness smoothed their path. If a man's eye lingered on the fresh face of the girl, creamy and pure as the heart of a tea-rose, it never seemed to Miss Lennox that it was with impertinence; and indeed it would have been strange if even coarseness had not hung its head abashed before the gentle dignity of those watchful eyes, looking out beneath the coronet of soft, white hair. Miss Lennox was a better guardian than she knew. Since force rouses force, even a strong man might in some instances have fared worse than she. But goodness wedded with grace being strong, silent powers in the woman, at least when, as in this instance, she who has them is too old to arouse envy, rough places were everywhere made smooth for aunt Serena; and she would often say gratefully, "How kind people are! How easy travelling is, after all!" not realizing that they who are ready to fight with a wild beast will shelter a wandering dove. And Rose, happy Rose, unreproached for being tall and conspicuous, no longer in disgrace for the changing glow of her young cheek or the varying tones of her rich voice, never knew

that her fresh, beautiful girlhood was a delight to many as she passed, that others paid her the unconscious tribute of envious criticism; and so she went on her innocent way rejoicing.

They passed through the perils of the deep with the experiences which usually attend a first voyage. The facetious young man was on the "Aspasia." Also the girl who sings. The person who, when seasick, begs piteously to be thrown overboard, was there, as well as the jovial gentleman who has never felt the faintest symptom of seasickness, and who walks up and down the deck, slapping his broad breast, all ignorant of qualms and misery, and in an insultingly robust manner proclaims his views before the pale ghosts of their former selves, lying about in steamer-chairs. "It is all a matter of will, a simple matter of will, don't you know?" he would say, with conviction in his tone; but he never convinced the silent, nerveless phantoms.

Once fairly on the other side, Miss Lennox and Rose were simple, whole-souled travellers. They did not belong to the weakly, demonstrative order of tourists, nor yet were they characterized by that paucity of approval which many regard as the strongest evidence of extremely refined taste. It was perhaps a matter of temperament with them that they could not become weary of what they had not yet known. And as they formed their opinions honestly for themselves, there was at least one worthy element in their modest art-criticisms, and one rare in the madding crowd of sight-seers, —

truth. They would even have preferred to nobly admire the wrong thing, rather than to meanly admire the right; but then, in apology for this eccentricity, it must be remembered that they were as unsophisticated as they were independent, and that they came from Northbrooke, Me.

In an old cathedral, monument of art and history, epitome of ages of toil and endeavor, they stood silent, watching the kneeling, foreign throng, yet knew themselves akin to it. With tender reverence they heard, soaring above the anthem of to-day, the innumerable pleading voices of the past, — the murmur of the mighty human tide that had surged and broken there, — and felt the one great heart-throb of the yearning, loving, suffering mass of mortals, whose prayers still floated through the lofty vaults, whose spirits still haunted the dim aisles.

It did not occur to aunt Serena and Rosamond to regard the structure with condescension. They were so simple as to lose themselves in its actual and suggested vastness. Their minds never assumed attitudes of cold caution and stern reserve. Their critical powers did not saunter idly about, awarding supercilious approval to a perfect arch, faint praise to a massive shaft, and viewing with languid tolerance the flaming glories of old stained glass. Nor did they ascend to an impossible intellectual height, and look down with commiseration on the loftiest spire. Happily we do not all reach this height, for its summit is giddy and its base insecure.

They liked castles, too, — castles in veritable ruins, and even castles in good repair, with new frescos telling old tales, — and with apparently well-oiled automatic guides, warranted to go in three languages, — destroying every possibility of idly dreaming within those ancient walls.

Their devious course would be no model route for a guide-book. They were unlimited as to time, and led only by their own, or rather Rose's own, pleasure; and her chief desire was to go wherever her father and mother had gone twenty years before. They loitered a few days in sedate Holland, and liked the ships and the barges, the sleepy canals, the stately trees, the queer, leaning houses, the thrift, the pictures, and the people.

They observed much not mentioned in guide-books, and failed to see much recommended by those necessary evils. There was no one to reproach them, to hurry them, to thrust objects of interest upon their notice. Better still, they met no one who asked, "You, of course, saw such a thing at such a place? No? Really, what a pity!" in a tone of commiseration that implied their whole misguided wanderings, their trip across the Atlantic, their very lives indeed, had been in vain. They saw many pictures, and carried away in their hearts the dear remembrance of a few. One wild, dark night they stood on the beach at Scheviningen, and listened to the chattering, noisy crowd sitting at little tables eating and drinking, and gently stepped aside to avoid the rows of bold, curiously

clad fisherwomen striding up and down with noisy laughter and coarse jest. They heard the thunder of the giant breakers upon the shore, and watched the sea-gulls flying low over the gleaming white caps, and thought, "It is the same sea that softly washes the tangled banks of our Nest. How small the world is, after all!" They wandered about drowsy Ghent, and heard the carillon at Bruges, and dreamed many hours away in the beautiful churches of Antwerp; and so, without haste, came on to Cologne, to rest a while in the shadow of its cathedral.

They sailed slowly up the Rhine, stopping here and there as the whim seized them, wandering among the vineyards in the pleasant September sunshine, finding it good to be alive and gaze upon such fairness. They looked upon all things with happy, grateful eyes, not feeling too strongly the necessity of committing every thing to memory. The proud husband, who boasted that his wife had been in a hundred and fifty hotels in Italy, and could remember their names and those of most of their owners, would have had small respect for our indolent friends. It was a mild, long autumn, so warm, indeed, that Swiss hotel-keepers were rejoicing in what they called a "second season;" and the world lingered, loath to leave its pleasure-ground, which seemed to gain loveliness each day in the tender autumn hazes.

"I like every thing better with a haze, people as well as mountains," remarked aunt Serena, as

they were sailing in one evening toward the towers of Lucerne. "That is, with a few exceptions. I have known, it is true, one or two beings who did not need the softening illusory veil."

"I would rather the haze would lift once in a while," said Rosamond with decision. "Fancy seeing it always before one's eyes, and never knowing what lies beneath."

"But if ugly sights lie beneath, scarred rocks, gloomy chasms?" said Miss Lennox.

"Still, I should want to see them once as they are," persisted the young girl: "then your pretty mists and hazes might roll in, and beautify as much as they like. But the naked truth I must have, or be miserable;" and she nodded her spirited head conclusively, as if the truth were something always to be found if courage and energy go in pursuit.

Aunt Serena shook her head doubtfully. "You are very young, my dear," she said. The two grew silent, and gazed off over waves tinged deep with the sunset glow. They saw sleeping forests, golden and violet lights trembling and fleeing at the approach of the strong, dark night, remote white, shining peaks, and all the lofty loveliness of the mountains. Rose grew dreamy and wondering before the vastness of the eternal hills, and the unknown future stretching out beyond her; while the sweet old eyes looked gently back upon the heights and depths, the sunshine and the snows, of more than sixty years.

So they went on in their uneventful course, in the

travelling world, yet not of it; and after a few days on the lake of Geneva, where they went only because simple Rose had actually expressed a desire to see the castle of Chillon, — being uninstructed by late authorities, and not knowing that she would be doing that venerable old pile a favor by visiting it, — they turned their faces toward South Germany; and the last of October found them established in a family *pension* of unquestionable standing, to which unsuspecting Miss Lennox had been led by the letters and recommendations of friends.

CHAPTER V.

"Forty thousand weathercocks,
Each well minded to keep his place,
Turning about in the great and small ways!

I cannot tell how it may strike you;
But it strikes me now, for the first and last time,
That there may be better things to do
Than watching the weathercocks for pastime."

OWEN MEREDITH.

THE *pension* proved to be, upon the whole, the most extraordinary feature of Miss Lennox's European experience. In after years she was never able to allude to it without an expression of mild surprise creeping over her face. The leaning tower of Pisa, the dimensions of St. Peter's, the loftiness of the most impressive mountain, the curious customs of the most curious folk, never filled her with the profound amazement to which the idiosyncrasies of the *pension* gave birth in her gentle soul. And no two mortals from the sunny over-world, suddenly finding themselves among the restless shades of Hades, could have been more at variance with their surroundings than were she and Rosamond amid the motley assembly, the gossip, the more or less successful social struggles, the petty jealousies and bickerings of this caravansary. They were, it is to be hoped,

not all bad at heart, these twelve or fifteen fellow-boarders. Collectively, they sometimes seemed positively iniquitous. The dwellers in Wynburg *pensions* were, for the most part, only people who had little to do, who wished to be amused, and had for some years belonged to the floating population of English and American colonies in various foreign cities. Elderly matrons who do not care for books, who find their tongues too stiff for foreign vowels, and their memories treacherous for foreign verbs, whose young daughters are busy with governesses and music-masters, must, it is evident, occupy themselves in some way. At home they were, no doubt, model housekeepers, expending a vast amount of energy in a legitimate direction, and being, for the most part, harmless members of dull and respectable social circles in provincial towns. There, away from their ancient landmarks, deprived of the duties of their order, without occupation of their own, they busied themselves with other people. Their innocent, elderly heads were turned by the titles about them, yet beyond their reach, since impecunious counts seek wealth to build up their fallen fortunes; and the little Matildas studying music at the Conservatory, daughters of this class of women, have usually more merit than money. These misguided souls constituted themselves a kind of inquisitorial committee to ferret out the origin, social position, important facts in the past history, and future intentions of new-comers from America. It is a curious psychological problem, this effect of a sojourn in a

Continental city upon mature, prosaic women, this demoralization, so to speak, of the worthy mothers in Israel.

At home they may have had few or no social ambitions; but idleness, under these rapidly varying influences, begets snobbishness, snobbishness begets envy, malice, and cruelty, until the utterance of belittling personalities becomes a passion: and, if a pure archangel had descended before their eyes, his robe would not have been white enough for them, his flaming sword not bright enough; and they would have raised their eyebrows questioningly over his social position unless they could have been assured that Mrs. Van Rensalaer had invited him to dine.

This class made the rank and file. The leaders were sometimes women with more or less claim to position, it may be people of actual social distinction. When prominent actors in this daily comedy had known each other at home, it was an inestimable advantage. "Poor dear Mrs. A!" says Mrs. B. "How well I remember her in New York, when she was trying desperately for years to catch young Goldfish; and how often I have seen her brother lifted drunk from his carriage!" "Poor dear Mrs. B!" says Mrs. A. "How well I remember her in New York, though I never did believe quite all the dreadful things they said about her! The world is so harsh in its judgments, you know. Her people were nobodies. Hardware, I believe. My dear brother came home one day and said he had just

lent her brother fifty cents in a horse-car." And when the ladies meet, they kiss, and greet each other with graceful and solicitous effusion.

Viewed simply as gossip, standing quite on its own merits, there was never any gossip superior to the gossip of the English-speaking colony of Wynburg. The ingenuous tittle-tattle of a rural town, the systematic, well-organized gossip of a church sewing-society, sewing for the poor of the parish, the gossip of the most acidulated and venomous old maids, even the gossip of gossippy old men, — if the truth were known, this is one of the most virulent forms of the disease, — are all only as moonlight unto sunlight and as water unto wine, compared with the gossip of Wynburg. This had a freshness, an elasticity, a vigor, a creative power, all its own. Meet a false story boldly, fight with it, crush it to earth, Antæus-like it gained strength, and rose to confront you at every turn. It is possible elsewhere that time may soften harsh facts in your life's story, that people may forget. Never here. In some places one may escape comment by living a secluded life. In Wynburg, gossip angrily defied you to dwell apart, and, if you persisted, proclaimed your nefarious secret schemes in the market-place. English and American old residents preserved the traditions intact. Women living in *pensions* brought new material, combined and disseminated.

Even the little English church was made an instrument in the work of propagation. This was

surely not the Mother Church, offering her warm and loving shelter to poor, oppressed, and weary wanderers. Homesick souls who hoped to find the protection and comfort that had never failed them within the walls of the sanctuary, felt lonely and lost amid the restless, pushing worldliness of this ante-room to society, where eager aspirants thronged to pass preliminary examination, and more favored ones competed for possible promotion.

Dearest enemies met here, and called themselves with truth lost sheep Sunday after Sunday, and, after the peace of God of the benediction, watched greedily at the porch for a bow from Lady Manners, anxious to observe if she had or had not noticed the pretty widow who had appeared only two days before, and whom the experts found difficulty in classifying.

The little temple had a strait gate and a narrow way; but whither it led, the saintliest charity must have discerned. Many salaams and genuflections were made within its walls to powers of this world; and the people who had been rending one another all the week met to take account of stock, and see that no one had been forgotten in the inventory. The sermon droned out by the English curate, the choir, consisting chiefly of voluntary offerings of voices that could not sing, were to Vanity Fair not specially attractive formalities. Yet the little church was always full. You saw everybody there, for one thing. Then there was a certain pleasure in admitting, in a safe, general way that you had

been erring and straying, when Mrs. Van Rensalaer on the left, and Lady Manners on the right, were condescending so much as to publicly state that they had been erring and straying too.

The many thriving *pensions* worked, then, like so many mills, and, together with the beneficent influence of the aristocratic little brown church, kept the American and English colony of Wynburg in a delightfully wide-awake condition; and the well-fed current of sprightly personal discussion swept vigorously along. Happily, our innocent travellers were not aware of the peculiar piquant joys in store for them; and the evening of their arrival, dusty, travel-stained, and weary, they viewed their haven of rest with indescribable content.

The house was well built and modern, with the advantage of somewhat æsthetic surroundings in the shape of old mottled red-roofs rising in every direction. It stood on slightly elevated ground. Opposite its entrance was one of those small and distinctively German parks where every winding and would-be-sequestered way is lighted by a glaring gas-lamp; and every preposterously uncomfortable bench, seen in the distance, looks beguiling, while approached, and viewed beneath the prying stare of the lamp, suggests the chronic objection of the German municipal authorities to love's young dream.

This first night the *pension* did not show its cloven hoof. Its expression was mild and welcoming. Its conditions were as smooth as its highly polished

parquet-floors, and Frau Rudolph beamed upon them with the cordial smile which she had practised for twenty years with admirable results. She was a bit of a *diplomate* in her way, this stout and excellent person.

"They come and they go," she would say meaningly to her own people. "They come and they go! What is the use of liking people who come and go?" But she was kind and watchful and wise and scrupulously honest, and the people who "come and go" always fared well with her. She smiled when she understood her guests, smiled equally when she understood nothing, looked after their temporal comforts in a motherly fashion, never took sides in their quarrels, or indeed recognized the existence of any unpleasantness beneath her roof, however much complaint was poured into her ears, and however many days her two leading ladies were plainly not on speaking-terms at dinner. And while on the other hand, since nature must have an outlet, she indulged in a spirited set-to each day with her brace of elephantine Suabian maid-servants, using language so loud and vehement it would seem almost impossible for them to forget it, either in this world or in the world to come, in reality the bitterness of her invective did not detract from the kindly relationship of mistress and maid, but was all *vox et praeterea nihil*, resembling abuse only as the loud crack of a whip in the ears of a toiling cart-horse resembles the cruel lash on his patient flank. A long residence in Germany is apt to teach us of a

more thin-skinned and irritable race; that violent quarrels often go for nothing; that railings and revilings are only a kind of sanitary measure, like a locomotive letting off steam; that the good folk may be warmest friends in spite of these little eccentricities of intercourse; and woe be to the stranger who, from philanthropic or other motives, interferes.

Smiling Frau Rudolph, then, with rosy cheeks, smooth brown hair, and small shrewd eyes, meets Miss Lennox and Rosamond at the door, and with cheery bustle directs the arrangement of their trunks, all the time taking their measure. "They will not like the colonel or clumsy Mrs. Lancaster, and they will not at first understand Mrs. Vivien; but later, ah, later!" and her eyes twinkled maliciously. Then aloud to the men, "So, straight across until they are unpacked." To the ladies, in her careful English, "Like you it not so, madame? So it will be besser?" Seizing a large bag, and continuing her mental processes, "They have soft ways. The little old one is a good one. She will be good to Fräulein Gertrude. We shall see. We shall see. But they will not stay." "So, my ladies," she remarks, "command you tea? command you meat? No? Then, I leave you now to sweet repose. What you wish, you ring. I hope you be awfully happy by me."

Having made her little speech with smiling deliberation, Frau Rudolph briskly withdraws.

"What a comfortable, nice sort of person, and what delicious English!" laughed Rose.

"Slang seems the easiest part of a language," remarked Miss Lennox meditatively, "for a foreigner to learn. Now, there was that nice-looking clerk in the shop in Geneva, where we were looking at watches, who was a miracle of courtesy in French, and who, finding we spoke English, was so eager to air his own, and so innocently amusing with his abrupt "Now, then, old lady. Look alive! It's all right, you bet!"

"Wretched little man!" exclaimed Rose, "I do wish somebody would say such a thing to aunt Harriet, she would be so infuriated; and it's quite lost on you, you dear!" and she carefully removed Miss Lennox's hat and travelling-cape from that very weary little lady, who was reclining in a great chair as if glad to find something at last with a stationary back. "Nothing affects your dignity, because yours is the right kind."

"Of course I could not blame the poor young man, who was doing his very best for me, and looking at me with the most deferential and affable expression in the world; but I did regret that he had learned his English in so curious a school," said Miss Lennox placidly.

Rose looked at the gentle, weary face, still smiling in indulgent remembrance of the luckless salesman's English, and glancing with somewhat humorous observation at the rooms which were to be their winter quarters. A sudden compunction seized the girl.

"Oh! do you think you will be happy here?" she exclaimed. "You are so angel-good to me, and I

have dragged you so far from home, and I know you are more tired than you ever say. Shall you like it? Can we make it seem home-y to you?" and Rose looked anxiously about, then knelt, and pressed her warm cheek against aunt Serena's, and caressed the delicate hands that lay listless and fatigued on the carved oak arms of Frau Rudolph's sainted grandmother's best chair.

"You spoil me, dearest child. The absurdity of spoiling an old woman like me!" said aunt Serena cheerfully; but she closed her eyes, and gently threw back her head, with an air of breathing in with every breath a positive and blessed rest. "Yes, dear, I shall like it. I do like it. In fact, I regard the journey as a distinguished success. It is true, I have been somewhat addicted to starting off the train at every station, nervously insisting that we had arrived at our destination, and no doubt being a great annoyance to the good-natured guards"—

"Who were always kindly but unceremoniously pushing us back in our places, as if we were animated travelling-bags," laughed Rose.

"But people have been very good to us, even if we were stupid, and could not understand their words: happily one needs no encyclopædia to interpret kindness. And now, my rosebud, I confess I am glad to rest, indefinitely rest; and, if you are happy, I shall be," she concluded emphatically. Opening her eyes, and looking about with mild scrutiny, "We will put some rugs down on this glassy floor, I think, my dearie; because old bones

are brittle, and I never learned to skate when I was young. A few touches here and there, some books and pictures, will make the rooms delightful. Now draw up those jalousies, Rose, and open all the casements, that we may see to what shores we have drifted."

A flood of western sunlight poured through several large windows into the room. Beyond the broad street rose high, irregular, red roofs, upon which little dormer windows blossomed out in a rich and surprising growth, and threw long, sharp shadows over mossy, mottled red, golden-brown, and greenish-gray patches. In the highest little window of the highest roof was a pot of crimson pinks, a great white cat, with his tail stiffly erect, and a baby's shirt hanging to dry, — all making a subtle suggestion of home-happiness under the ridgepole. Over the way, in the small park, were a couple of sleepy nurses in attendance on some staid, solemn babies, and a group of laughing children. One of those dainty, languid, melted-into-his-uniform, blond lieutenants, who can be so recklessly, magnificently brave in action, sauntered by to the music of his own sabre and spurs. The air was cool, yet soft with the haze of late October. As they stood, silent and content, from the old, gray, stone tower off at the left a choral, a harvest-song of thanksgiving, sounded through the still air. They did not know what it was, but its effect was unspeakably sweet and solemn. Beyond the church-tower and the roofs rose the gently undulating hills, encircling the whole city like loving,

clasping arms, and to-day, seen through the autumn mists, as darkly blue as the bloom of the grapes that ripen on their sunny slopes.

Rose drew a deep breath. "It is lovely," she said. "And the strangest thing is, that we are in it. When other people are in such things, it never seems strange; but to feel ourselves in it! Are you sure you like it?" she asked again anxiously.

"If this is what you call 'it,' I am sure I do, very sure," said Miss Lennox softly. "Let your heart be quite at rest about me, my sweet child;" and they stood together at the casement, while the music from the high tower floated over the city, and the hill-tops shone out in the sunlight above the purple mists.

CHAPTER VI.

Οὐ τοι συνεχθειν, ἀλλα συιφιλειν ἐφυν.

"Thay say. Quhat say thay? Thay haf said. Lat them say."

"SALT!" commanded the colonel in a stentorian voice, as if at the head of his regiment. Miss Lennox started nervously, not accustomed to so much *basso profundo* at dinner. Rose repressed a smile, and the salt meekly marched up to the head of the table. As no one seemed surprised, she justly concluded that this was the colonel's habitual manner. "Will he now say, 'Present spoons'?" she wondered. Glancing about with considerable amusement, she met the direct gaze of a pale, fair-haired girl, who had come in late, and, with a haughty, almost imperceptible greeting, directed to no one in particular, had quietly taken her place, and devoted her exclusive attention to a plate of very cold soup. Past Mrs. Lancaster — who was a widow indeed — and her little daughters; past the voluble, graceful, smooth-tongued Mrs. Vivien, — who was what may be called an American widow, having been for five years regretting that Mr. Vivien's business kept him in New York; past two shy students, a Norwegian and a South-

American, who understood little English, — Rose met the keen inquiry of the strange girl's eyes; and then, the kindly smile vanishing as it appeared on the rather sarcastic lips, and she knew that her objections to the colonel were shared by one of the company at least. "How pretty and clever she looks! I wish I could speak to her. Why does she talk with nobody? and why does nobody introduce her to us? Everybody else was introduced." Rose's speculations were interrupted by the colonel, who, with both elbows on the table, was remarking encouragingly, —

"Now, I say, you Americans on the Continent, you could learn considerable from us English, if you'd only take the trouble." And his wife and four children gazed at him with inexpressible pride and admiration. "This gigantic idea could only have emanated from papa," was depicted upon their rapt faces.

"We can all learn from one another in this world," remarked Mrs. Lancaster in a heavy, uncompromising manner, from the opposite end of the table. She did not like the colonel, did not intend to be put down by him, and never forgot that the late Mr. Lancaster had been member of Congress.

"Now, colonel, don't you think I make the most of my advantages?" inquired little Mrs. Vivien, smiling, and shaking her bangles.

"I do," solemnly answers the colonel, who was not insensible to Mrs. Vivien's purring attractions. She was so childlike, so deprecating with men, they

all liked her. She seemed to be hanging anxiously upon the colonel's words. "I do," he repeats. "You might have been a very different woman if you'd always lived in America."

Mrs. Lancaster's silent commentary was, "I should say as much, and it's a pity she has not;" but, as she and Mrs. Vivien were useful to each other, her countenance was discreetly impassive.

The pale girl, however, smiled peculiarly, which did not escape Mrs. Vivien's glance, innocently roving in search, it would appear, of sympathy in her work of self-improvement, and encouragement to renewed efforts.

"Little minx! I owe her another one," she recorded on the strong tablets of her memory. "Miss Peyton," she said very gently, and slightly drooping her eyelids, "are you not looking pale to-day? I hope you are not working too hard. You should really take more exercise. If you are too occupied days, why not a little stroll evenings? You could prevail upon Frau Rudolph, or some other nice, responsible person, to take you out, I am sure, dear Miss Peyton."

"Thanks, Mrs. Vivien. I am often out evenings, as you know. I saw you watching in your window as I came in last night at ten," said Miss Peyton in a rich, contralto voice, and with perfect composure.

Her voice was so beautiful, Miss Lennox and Rose glanced at her with evident interest.

"Yes," said Mrs. Vivien sweetly. "I was watching the stars. I am so fond of Sirius!" she added

dreamily. "But you give the first watch of the night to Mars, to the red planet Mars, do you not, Miss Peyton?"

"I never studied astronomy, and I am not poetical," said Miss Peyton in her cool, sweet tones. "But if you mean to say you saw me walking with Lieut. von Falkenstein, your eyes did not deceive you."

A rustle of horror agitated the assembly. Mrs. Vivien looked around with appealing eyes which seemed to say, "I call the gods to witness that I have not invoked this catastrophe." The wife of the colonel seemed about to gather her chickens under her wing; and Mrs. Lancaster's twins, not bad-looking girls of fifteen, looked at their mamma and giggled, then looked at each other and giggled again, tried to appear shocked and important like their mamma, yet were so overjoyed to even hear a lieutenant's name mentioned, their mouths broke out into involuntary smiles, and their eyes danced with delight.

Miss Lennox was looking at Gertrude Peyton with gentle directness. "Why is this pretty young girl so cold and defiant? She has an honest, sensitive face. I fear she is unhappy. They may not understand her. I will say something to her." But before Miss Lennox could speak, Rose, who had been silent, oppressed by the strange and unsympathetic atmosphere, quite forgot it in a chivalrous desire to enroll herself under the banner of the attacked, and began, with a little constraint, since

Gertrude's haughty face gave her, in itself, no encouragement, "I am glad you like walking, Miss Peyton. Perhaps you will let me go with you sometimes. I'm always eager for exercise, and my poor aunt makes a martyr of herself for me."

Without speaking, Gertrude Peyton looked with grave expectance at Miss Lennox. "Will this little fine old lady, with the silvery hair and luminous eyes, turn from me like all the world? Will she hush into silence this cordial voice, the only one that has been raised for me in three long years?" she thought bitterly. Yet her glance betrayed no anxiety, no bitterness. With composure it rested on the face of the aunt, instead of on that of the young girl who had spoken. Mrs. Vivien smiling, and gently smoothing the lace at her wrists, was also waiting. They had not long to wait.

"I should be grateful to you, my dear," Miss Lennox said, "if you would care to show my niece the pretty ways about these hills: at home in the country she goes alone very often, but I believe it is not customary here;" and she looked about with gentle inquiry.

"It would not be proper for Miss Rosamond Wellesley," remarked Mrs. Lancaster, with the air of a mistress of ceremonies at the Spanish court. It was already whispered in the *pension* that Miss Lennox was one of the Northbrooke Lennoxes, and that the young girl was more or less connected with the Beaconswolds of Boston, also that they had a letter of introduction to the Raymonds, all of which

naturally opened the way to the Van Rensalaers, if not to Lady Manners.

"It was only by accident that I found it out," Mrs. Vivien had whispered that morning to Mrs. Lancaster. "She acts as if she were not going to make much of it, looked quite blankly at me when I asked her if she had left her card at the Raymonds, then smiled rather curiously, and said she had hardly yet recovered her breath from her journey." — "Oh, she's guarded, she's guarded! That cooing-dove kind of woman always is," Mrs. Lancaster had replied, with her ponderous infallibility. She goes on, "It would be highly undesirable for Miss Rosamond Wellesley," which clearly implied that it was a matter of utter indifference to her and to people in general what Miss Gertrude Peyton did or did not do.

"Why, this is positive cruelty to animals," thought aunt Serena pityingly; and Rose turned straight to her, and laid her hand appealingly on her aunt's knee under the table.

"And, my dear," aunt Serena continued, as if unmindful of all except the pale girl whose quiet face was regarding only her," if you can have patience with an old woman who is not a very valiant climber, I wish you young people would take me with you occasionally. There is a tower I saw" —

A great wave of color swept over Gertrude Peyton's white face, and in her eyes was a shining, suffused look. She knew how to bear stabs without

flinching, but this benign protecting arm reaching out as if to bless her weary young head! She simply could not speak; and Rosamond broke in with a little nervous laugh, "O auntie, you could never, never walk so far as that tower! It is miles away, I am sure."

"Four English miles from here by the foot-path, which is steep, five by the winding carriage-road," stated the colonel. He had been paying little attention to the conversation. He did not like woman's talk, and he did like his dinner; but if they wanted to know any thing sensible, — distances, statistics, — that was another thing.

His burly, self-important, yet not unkind voice seemed to relieve the over-charged atmosphere. Gertrude rapidly recovered her usual reticent manner; and the conversation, growing general, strayed innocently enough through shady lanes, by-ways, and woodlands, counting miles and noting views about Wynburg. Some one spoke of a little Gothic church in a village near by, and the colonel in high good-humor gave the height of the steeple.

Presently Mrs. Lancaster, who was a person to whom, as she herself admitted, all churches looked alike, inside and outside, hills were an aggravation and woods a bore, in short, to whom a yellow primrose was a yellow primrose, turns squarely upon Rose with, —

"What do you intend to pursue, Miss Wellesley?"

Rose felt a strong inclination to laugh. A vivid picture of a rapid chase, a wild hunt, a fleet, illu-

sive object in advance, herself breathlessly following, was suggested by Mrs. Lancaster's curiously emphatic "pursue."

"I do not quite understand you," Rose answered civilly.

"I mean what branches? What branches are you going to pursue? Molly and Daisy pursue nine," said the complacent mother. "But perhaps you are finished."

"I hope not," exclaimed Rose heartily. "I should be very sorry if that were the case;" and she laughed, and looked at her aunt, who said, "I have not made many plans as yet, not even about Rosamond's studies. We have simply come, that is all."

"Ah, indeed!" returned Mrs. Lancaster rather stiffly. She disapproved on principle of people who did not make plans. "People who come here usually have an object."

"We are all diligent here, especially Miss Peyton. She is so very diligent," sighed Mrs. Vivien with a voice like spun glass.

"I fear we have no plans, at least none that deserve to be mentioned," Miss Lennox continued pleasantly. "We hope to enjoy ourselves. I think we shall," she added, looking cheerfully around the table, and letting her kind glance rest on Gertrude Peyton.

Gertrude drew a long, deep sigh of relief. Actually two beings, like lilies of the field, that neither toil nor spin, like fair angels from the skies above,

had appeared, with no plans, no object, no designs upon the Conservatory, no feverish dream of taking an express-train up the hill of science, no spasmodic attempt at art-culture.

"I am glad," she said. There was a rich, warm gladness in her voice that surprised herself.

"Glad that we are indolent?" asked Rose with her happy smile.

"Yes, it is so very restful." Gertrude rose, and after her queer little obeisance to the world at large, as it were, which seemed to Rose so pretty and foreign, came round to Miss Lennox, and put out her hand with a soft, unwonted, clinging grace. Mrs. Lancaster sniffed, the colonel's wife stared, and Mrs. Vivien smiled her gleaming smile; but Gertrude, unmoved, without a word closed her fingers firmly over aunt Serena's, then, with the same seriousness, took Rose's hand in hers, and quickly left the room. They little knew she had never done so much before, that the poor child had never, indeed, had occasion. Already she felt a passionate gratitude to these two strangers. "The world may knock me about as it will," thought the girl proudly, "but 'the hand of Douglas is his own.' When I give my hand in that way, I give my faith. They will see."

No sooner had the door closed than Mrs. Vivien, addressing the whole dinner-company in her sweetly confiding way, lamented Miss Peyton's eccentricity. "Such an interesting girl, but really so eccentric," she murmured. "To think now that

she could so misunderstand me, and I meant it so kindly."

"She has a temper," thundered the colonel, "a temper!" and Miss Lennox started again suddenly. "No woman has any right to have a temper. That's what I'm always telling my wife;" and the choleric colonel glared at the meek-faced partner of his joys and sorrows, who blushed uneasily, as if somewhere in her down-trodden remembrance a little puny ghost of a temper had started up to torment her. "A woman ought to be smooth-spoken, amiable, amiable," he repeated, and looked with undisguised approval at pretty Mrs. Vivien, who modestly cast down her eyes. They were bright, clever eyes; and no one had ever told her that they were too near together.

"No girl is an interesting girl who walks out evenings with a lieutenant," Mrs. Lancaster, the oracle, announced. "Why, if my Molly and my Daisy"—here she paused, unable through excess of maternal solicitude to complete her sentence; and the twins looked at each other in a sort of shuddering rapture. It could never be. They, too, were proud of their mamma's eternal vigilance. They had the supreme consciousness that no twins in the world were better chaperoned than they, Molly and Daisy Lancaster; and yet—to walk out evenings with a lieutenant!"—there was bliss in the mere shadowy suggestion.

Mrs. Vivien nodded regretfully, as if justice compelled her to support her friend Mrs. Lancaster's

pronunciamento, even though the foolish promptings of a too kind heart would seek to protect the misguided girl.

"Let us throw the mantle of charity over the lieutenant," she suggested sweetly.

"It would have to be a very large mantle, if he's that enormous young man I saw on the stairs yesterday," said Rose in a quick undertone to her aunt.

Mrs. Vivien, whom nothing escaped, noticed the girl's merry manner, though she did not hear the words. "And yet I am sure some girls would and could not be so sadly indiscreet as poor dear Miss Peyton. Now, you, for instance, Miss Wellesley, could any thing induce you to take an evening stroll with a lieutenant? Could you imagine it?"

"Why not?" said Rose simply and quite unabashed, "if he were very nice."

"What a very wonderful young lady," thought Molly and Daisy Lancaster, opening their blue eyes very wide, "to dare say such a thing!"

Aunt Serena looked amused. Rose's training, like that of most well-bred American girls, had led her to have no instinctive fear or even consciousness in the presence of men. She neither regarded them each and all as wolves nor as possible lovers; and while her youth and secluded life had thrown her perhaps unusually little into men's society, her frank, half boyish comradeship with her cousin Harold, and her aid to her aunt in dispensing the hospitality of the Nest, whenever old friends appeared to

claim it, above all her very slight knowledge of flippant, vulgar chatter, and her constant intercourse with a woman of rare dignity, and nobleness of thought, had united to render her perfectly simple and natural to men as to women. She had been always guarded, but the necessity of the guard had never been made apparent or even mentioned to her. She was even capable of being utterly unconscious of the astounding fact of a *tête-à-tête* with a man. As no one had ever implied to her that there was any thing dangerous or sinful in being alone with any one whatever, she would look straight into the face of the person with whom she was talking, with her calm, wide, child-like eyes that could so quickly grow eager or mirthful with a suggestive word or a passing thought. Perhaps the day would come when the clear, steady eyes would droop and the brave mouth would tremble in the presence of a man; but surely not for every man must she lose her sweet freedom and fearlessness. Not for every man must she falter and flutter. Not before every man must her high, pure spirit do obeisance. What will the true king have when he comes to his throne, if his golden tribute has been wasted on every passer-by? And when will the dull world learn that truth may look out of the heart of a maiden through loyal, fearless eyes, while false coquetry often droops the lid, and sends the shy, conscious flush to the cheek?

But naturally Miss Lennox was amused.

"Here is my Rose," she thought, "my fresh wild-rose, actually discussing a question of etiquette

publicly. Good. She may be rash: she will never be ignoble."

"I am sure you are playful, Miss Wellesley," returned Mrs. Vivien in a caressing tone. "She is very playful, is she not, Miss Lennox?"

"I think not at this moment."

"You see, my dear Miss Wellesley, you are very young; but you have your estimable aunt always near you. I am sure you would be incapable of the slightest indiscretion."

"But a girl can make mistakes," said Rose resolutely, "and people may have different ideas and still do nothing wrong," with a vivid remembrance of Miss Weatherstone; "and" — disconnectedly — "I think it was very nice of Miss Peyton to take little walks with that lieutenant."

Again an ecstatic shudder seized Molly's and Daisy's souls.

"Ah!" sighed Mrs. Vivien softly, "Miss Peyton, — that's quite another thing."

"Yes," said Miss Lennox cheerily; "because she is alone, she would more naturally be led to seek young, bright companionship."

"She seeks it, or it seeks her, whichever it may be, every two or three days about eight in the evening;" and Mrs. Vivien showed her claws, and for once forgot to purr.

"But" — Rose checked herself. She had the habit of deference to older women. This Mrs. Vivien irritated her, and she was afraid of saying too much.

"I like Miss Peyton," said Miss Lennox slowly. "I hope to see much of her."

"Of course, dear Miss Lennox, if you choose to take such a girl up, — a mere nobody," murmured Mrs. Vivien with suave incoherence. "A person in your position, and a person studying music" —

"Still, I think it is our duty to tell you," and Mrs. Lancaster solemnly advanced to the charge, "that she is studying music professionally, as it were, not as a mere graceful accomplishment like Molly's and Daisy's."

"Ah!" said Miss Lennox, with unfeigned interest.

"And I have even heard," Mrs. Lancaster continued with her most lofty Mother-of-the-Gracchi expression, "that she may go on the stage. Consequently, while nothing would induce me to harm any one's reputation, or dictate to other people, I choose to protect Molly and Daisy."

Miss Lennox looked puzzled. "What possible danger threatened the twins?" Frau Rudolph, as was her custom, had now come in with the coffee, and expressed the formal wish to her guests that the meal might be blessed to them. Having performed this ceremony, which she herself valued highly, she withdrew, after saying cheerily to Miss Lennox as the latest comer, "You find it peas-ible by me? Friendly and peas-ible? That joys me much. Good-day, my ladies." Frau Rudolph was so wise as to leave her guests to themselves at table, and insure the proper serving of the dinner by her per-

sonal superintendence and aid. But her dignity as mistress of the house she nevertheless scrupulously maintained, and she would have considered it in jeopardy had she omitted this brief but effective rite. With kindly, unsuspicious mien she turned her rosy face kitchenwards. "They are serving up Fräulein Gertrude with the Devil's own sauce. May he fly away with that cat Mrs. Vivien!" was, however, her mental soliloquy. "The Vivien can never let the child alone; but the little old one is a good one, and the pretty Rose girl is a hero. There she was curling and quivering her lips at them, and flashing her great eyes, and still looking fresh and sweet as a flower at dawn. I would like those two, the old one and the little Rose; but they will not stay. I would like the little Gertrude too. But," shaking her wise head, "it doesn't pay. They all go. Well, well, let it work. It always works when new people come." And with a contented smile, philosophic Frau Rudolph sipped her coffee, black and strong, in her own corner among her shining pans, threw bread-crumbs down to the doves in the court, and put the yeast-like elements of her household completely out of her mind.

In the dining-room "it," whatever it may have been, was unquestionably working.

Miss Lennox had said, "Rose, dear, if you do not care for coffee, you might wait for me in our rooms." Rose quickly and thankfully disappeared.

"Curious!" commented watchful Mrs. Vivien. "She leaves the girl free to have opinions, yet

sends her, literally sends her, from the table like a child."

The colonel, satisfied that he had once more helped on the benevolent work of regenerating Americans on the Continent, had already withdrawn with his fond family, which was at least, whatever spiritual graces it left to be desired, neither malicious nor curious. The three ladies are left sipping their coffee, while Molly and Daisy almost put up their ears like young rabbits in their eagerness to know what is coming.

"Your niece is a beautiful girl, Miss Lennox," begins Mrs. Vivien, "a most charming girl."

"Rose is a good child," says aunt Serena simply.

"You will have to be very careful of her over here," warns Mrs. Lancaster.

"Thanks. Her health is perfect. She does not take cold easily," Miss Lennox responds pleasantly; and even Mrs. Vivien cannot tell whether this extraordinary obtuseness is real or feigned.

"I do not refer to her health," says the Cassandra of the *pension*. "I refer to her conduct, her associations, her companions."

"Ah! and that suggests a little matter I would like to ask you," aunt Serena goes on in her placid fashion; "but" — here she looks with kind inquiry at the twins and their mamma.

"Oh, you needn't mind Molly and Daisy. I always discuss every thing before them. They know my principles. I intend that they shall have

principles. What can be better for my girls than the constant companionship of their own mamma?"

Whether this profound question is unanswerable or not, at least aunt Serena does not try to answer it. "They are happily very young, poor dears: perhaps they may not understand," she thinks.

She accepts the situation, and, ignoring the twins, says, —

"Of course I would not wish to attach undue importance to careless table-talk. Still, as Miss Peyton interests me, I hope it is not out of place if I ask you for a little more definite information about her."

"Definite!" exclaims Mrs. Lancaster, bridling.

"Yes," aunt Serena continues with her courteous air. "Something a little more definite. You have, that is if I have not misunderstood you, plainly warned me against Miss Peyton."

"Advised, — merely advised, dear Miss Lennox," is Mrs. Vivien's gentle amendment.

"I warn!" says Mrs. Lancaster stoutly.

"Then I have not misunderstood. What is there against this sweet-looking young girl's character?"

Mrs. Lancaster puts down her coffee-cup, and stares.

Mrs. Vivien's eyes look out keenly from half-closed lids.

"And isn't it against her character that she walks out with a lieutenant?" demands Mrs. Lancaster.

Miss Lennox laughs her low, kindly laugh. "Not

necessarily, I should say. It might be. It might not be. It would depend upon many things. The kind of girl she is. The kind of lieutenant he is." And a quizzical smile plays on her lips.

"And what do you call her being alone here in Wynburg, without friends, without the sign of a chaperone, going to and from the Conservatory at all hours, going alone, Heaven knows where?"

"An accident, — a misfortune," answers aunt Serena gravely.

"And what do you call her not being received by any family of position? She does not know Mrs. Raymond, for instance."

"Again a misfortune, perhaps this time to Mrs. Raymond;" and aunt Serena smiles brightly, and thinks, "But that may be an easy matter to remedy."

Mrs. Vivien almost reads the thought. "Miss Pert is going to be taken up in good earnest, it seems."

"Dear Miss Lennox, you are going to be rash. You are going to make a mistake," she says, with an air of amiable solicitude.

Aunt Serena turns her soft, steady gaze full upon this pretty and much-adorned little person.

"Mrs. Vivien, I am an old woman. I must be more than thirty years older than you." This was an agreeable hypothesis to Mrs. Vivien, whose years were like a box of sewing-silks, — "assorted colors, to suit all needs." "But I have never yet hesitated to do what really seemed best for fear of making a

mistake. What if one does make a mistake? Why not acknowledge it to be a mistake, and, if necessary, withdraw from it?"

"Ah, you are very heroic," chirps Mrs. Vivien admiringly.

There is a pause. Presently Mrs. Lancaster, whose heavy battalions of principles have met with a shock, rallies.

"May I ask you to tell me, then, what things you do consider against a girl's character?"

Aunt Serena, astonished, hesitates, then replies very gently and solemnly, "Simply any thing which would actually detract from her truth and honor, which would stain the white soul within her."

She had a way of talking above the heads of her hearers, and never knowing it, the dear, simple heart. What had these women to do with the consideration of abstract truth and honor? They lived among things.

"I have had no exact system with my niece Rosamond," she went on thoughtfully. "Perhaps I have erred in this. But I should be grieved to see her losing her unconsciousness and fearlessness. She has never learned to be afraid. I should be pained if she should begin to think much about evil, even for the purpose of avoiding it. I have always had the idea, that, although I myself, as a girl, was far from a headstrong, impetuous, brilliant character," — she laughed softly, — "had any one said to me, 'Young girl, here is a pleasant garden, where

you may play; and here is a great, mysterious wall, with something highly interesting beyond, which you must not see or think about, — making daisy-chains would have palled upon me at last; and, though I might not have actually ventured on the forbidden ground, I am very sure I should at least have found a ladder, climbed up, and peeped over the wall to my heart's content."

"Ah, yes, we are all Eves," concedes Mrs. Vivien gracefully, pleased to be, for once, an Eve in such good company.

"Extraordinary!" exclaims Mrs. Lancaster.

"And so my Rosamond has never heard very much of the things she ought not to do, she has been so very much occupied with the things I have chosen for her to do," continued Miss Lennox placidly. "Different natures, it is true, require different treatment; and I am sure, Mrs. Lancaster, that you do what is wise for your dear little girls." Molly and Daisy gave this beautiful old lady, with hair as soft as a white dove's wing, a grateful glance. They had heard much about etiquette and propriety, but they had never before been called dear little girls.

"But, Miss Lennox," says Mrs. Lancaster, routed in English, and therefore resorting to her meagre supply of French, "are you not forgetting *les convenances?*"

"I hope not," replies Miss Lennox, with the dignity of the whole Lennox race in her mien.

"And they notice every thing, and they talk so

much," put in the little Vivien. "One must be careful."

"Who is — they?" inquires Miss Lennox, on heights beyond grammar. Then, suddenly, —

"Mrs. Lancaster, you will not think me rude and presuming," with a look that would have disarmed a demon; "but this lonely Peyton child touches my heart. She is thrown upon a hard world. My Rosamond is tenderly guarded; yet she might have been the waif, and Gertrude the pet lamb. Tell me, Mrs. Lancaster," and a faint, rose-leaf flush tinged the delicate old cheek, "you are an American woman. Did you never, when you were young, walk with any man except your husband?"

A vision of flooding sunset-light, a river-road in spring-time, youth, hope, freshness, the cool, earthy scent of wild violets, the slow sound of sweeping oars, the innocent, happy, boyish, boastful talk of her first love, rose before Mrs. Lancaster's prosaic soul. She was sixteen then, and he went away to seek his fortune: and she married Mr. Lancaster, who had been rich, and kind to her; and she had never regretted it. Still, in the strange, far-off picture there was no harm, — no harm indeed. But what a strange old lady.

"But, Miss Lennox, we are in Europe," she falters.

Aunt Serena looks at her thoughtfully. Then, with her winning yet stately grace, the little old lady rises.

"I quarrel with no system. Systems are things

for statesmen. Even etiquette for young girls belongs in a way to political economy; and I am a simple old woman, and do not understand that. Yet the ideal of maidenhood, — goodness, purity, a loving, unselfish heart, — that must — must be the same among all civilized people, whatever may be the superficial differences of training, and the misconceptions. We women are inclined to give small things too much importance, and to under-estimate great things, perhaps; so we may make it hard and confusing for young girls sometimes: and words are two-edged, we all know."

"But a lieutenant is — a lieutenant!"

"I should never presume to dispute that, Mrs. Lancaster;" and aunt Serena smiles her wise and harmless smile, and holds out her hand to the two ladies.

"I fear I have been very prosy," she says. "I thank you for your great patience. Good-by, my dears," with her hand on Molly's and Daisy's little smooth heads. "Good-by until evening."

CHAPTER VII.

"Not by appointment do we meet Delight and Joy:
They heed not our expectancy;
But, round some corner in the streets of life,
They, on a sudden, clasp us with a smile."

GERALD MASSEY.

"FLORENCE," said Sydney Bruce, laying down a volume of Tyndall, and holding his cigar lightly between two fingers, "I have met my ideal woman."

Mrs. Raymond nearly dropped the delicate china cup upon which, with rapid, sketchy strokes, she was painting a daisy and two fern-leaves. "I cannot spend much time on these cups," she was thinking. "The dinner-service is so elaborate with the fine gold arabesques and the dark *fond* and the monogram; and it needs so much time: but these will be pretty for afternoon-tea, and I can turn them off rapidly mornings. Fortunately this is the eleventh." She held it up to the light, and looked through it. Into her innocent porcelain-reveries walks her brother's ideal woman with crushing effect.

"Sydney," she gasped, "is it true?"

"Quite true," he responded gravely. "I saw her at the flower-market this morning."

Mrs. Raymond looked relieved. At least, it could not be either of those insupportable Arthur girls or Kitty Van Rensalaer. They were never known to be out at eight o'clock in the morning, or indeed visible until after the hairdresser's solemn rites at twelve. Her supreme wish was to have her brother marry; but she lived in deadly terror lest he should be entangled in the snares of some avaricious, mean-souled blond beauty.

"Really, Henry," she would say to her husband, "you clever men are such idiots sometimes. You all think a fresh complexion means purity of soul. Often it means only a good digestion."

"Also an excellent thing in woman," Mr. Raymond would calmly respond.

"Now, Sydney causes me more anxiety than my three children together. There is nobody like Sydney; but he'll certainly throw himself away on some stupid, selfish woman, who can never appreciate so much as his — instep! And after his experience too."

"Don't be uneasy, my dear," her husband would say consolingly. "Sydney is nobody's fool."

But she was uneasy, nevertheless. She never failed to know if Sydney's grave glance fell twice on a new face, never failed to take heart again when she observed one face was as another to him after all. She was a power in society. Graceful, fluent, admired, and courted. "Mrs. Raymond likes soft things," the world said. "She has always had soft things," and always said it with a shade of

reproach if not of malice, as if in some mysterious way Mrs. Raymond was at fault for having and liking soft things. Certainly she was unselfish in her desire to have Sydney take to himself a wife; for that wife, she knew, would necessarily monopolize the daily companionship and attention of the most devoted brother in the world. She did not even desire, after the fashion of women, to choose his wife for him. She only wished him to choose wisely. However, he manifested no matrimonial intentions whatever, and was the abiding despair of many mammas.

"Thirty-two years old, Sydney," she had said to him warningly, only the day before.

"And nothing done for immortality," was his indifferent, unsatisfying reply.

Now she simply sits still, and devours him with hungry eyes.

"Are you joking? Please do not joke, Sydney." Mrs. Raymond was as matter of fact as a perfectly graceful woman can well be. The teasing she endured yesterday from her husband and brother never enlightened her in the faintest degree as to the teasing of to-day.

"I am not joking, Folly. I have seen the loveliest woman in the world," he answered heartily.

"O Sydney, I really believe you mean it this time. Do I know her? Is she dark, or light? Is she as tall as I? What is her name?" with feverish eagerness.

"I do not think you know her. She is — if you

refer to her hair — light, extremely light. I certainly never saw lighter hair on any child," he went on slowly.

Mrs. Raymond clasped her hands tightly, and leaned forward. She was so impatient. "Why will Sydney persist in being so slow?" she thought. "And I do not know her name," he added between his whiffs.

"How does she look? How did you see her? Who was with her?"

"She had a *suite* with her, as befits my queen."

"O Sydney, dear, if you would only not be tiresome!"

"I am prepared to tell you the whole story if" —

Mrs. Raymond instantly leaned back in her chair, silent, and outwardly resigned.

He continued in a reflective manner, —

"Do you know, I am not sure that the flower-market in Florence is, after all, much more attractive than this one? This has not overhead, it is true, Italian skies; it has not the stately palaces near by, and romantic associations everywhere around, the precious Lucca della Robbia *relief*, the famed little pulpit in the corner, the gleaming eyes of the women, and the melody of the soft Tuscan tongue: but then, here is the strong old castle, the sturdy gray church-tower, with 'the people, ah, the people, they that dwell up in the steeple'" (Mrs. Raymond sighed); "and here are the rows of hideously ugly peasant women, who after all, in the mass, have a strong element of the picturesque; and

the sunlight made charmingly mellow effects this morning, even if we are not in Tuscany; and here I saw my ideal."

"Sydney, I always skip descriptions. I wish you would. And if you would not mind telling me with whom she was, Sydney?" Mrs. Raymond remarked, with an heroic effort at self-control.

"She was accompanied by six persons, — two beautiful young girls; two little school-girls exactly of a size, with long flaxen tails hanging down their backs. and excited. happy faces, as if they were doing something delightfully new and strange; then, a comely German woman, with shrewd all-seeing eyes; and a stout maid with a market-basket. The procession stopped to buy flowers of my particular old woman, — you know which one, — and I had the honor of handing to my lovely unknown a rosebud which she had let fall."

"How old is she?" asked Mrs. Raymond breathlessly. "Are you going to marry her?"

"As to that," Sydney said with extreme gravity, "there might be objections on the part of the lady; which possibility you, as a too indulgent sister, are always apt to ignore. She might discover something inharmonious, some discrepancy, in me."

"Nonsense!" returned his sister confidently. "But her age, Sydney?"

"I should say, — although I am never a fair judge of that question, and I imagine she looks old for her years, — about sixty three or four," he replied calmly.

Mrs. Raymond shrieked.

Sydney lighted another cigar.

"I never saw a woman like that. I never saw a smile like hers. Hair like drifted snow in the moonlight. Eyes like stars,—yes, soft *brown* stars," he repeated.

Mrs. Raymond laughed. "If it's no worse than that"—and she scrutinized her daisy.

Her brother read on steadily for a half an hour, then rising, and laying down his book, remarked, "Florence, you might find out who these people are. They belong to a very different world from that of most of your friends here."

"Why, of course I can find out any thing and every thing you wish, Sydney. You don't like Mrs. Vivien, but you must admit that she is a very useful person."

"As an agent of the secret police she would be invaluable: otherwise I fail to perceive her usefulness. The ferret is not my favorite animal."

"But she is clever, my dear."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Far cleverer than you imagine. Now, I shall simply say to her, 'Who was the lady to whom my brother handed a rose which she had dropped at the flower-market this morning?' And Mrs. Vivien, without one moment's hesitation, will tell me the names of the lady and all her companions, their claims on Wynburg society, their toilets, their ages, even the color of the rose."

"I beg you will not resort to such extreme meas-

ures on my account," he returned dryly. "I do not like the Vivien, as you say; and these ladies you will undoubtedly meet without her unpleasant interposition."

"But through the Vivien I can reach them quickest. I don't like her either, for that matter. Why not use her, if I can please you?"

Sydney smiled. "Little Jesuit, the end does not always justify the means. How do you pay your detective?"

Mrs. Raymond colored, and looked almost vexed. Sydney really had such strange notions. Then she said brightly, "Oh, I ask her here when I have what I call my 'menagerie party,'—an unpleasant but inevitable gathering of all the Americans once a year; and I am a grain more cordial to her than to her friend Mrs. Lancaster when I meet them at that stupid Dramatic Club or in a shop. She is then quite satisfied, especially as she entertains the sweet hope that I shall some day invite her to a small dinner with Mrs. Van Rensalaer and Lady Manners."

At length he said thoughtfully, "What an excellent title for a novel 'Door-mats of Power' would be!"

"I think so too," remarked Mrs. Raymond amiably. Why do you not write one? Now, Sydney dear, don't be superior. You call it worldly; but it's life, you know. Can I alter it? Let us take things as they are; and, first of all, let us find your nice people. I would use Mrs. Vivien exactly as I

would use my maid, — sending her on any errand whatever."

"Do not employ her on mine, if you please, Florence," he said with a slight coldness. He loved his sister tenderly, but he was apt to feel a vague dissatisfaction now and then after a chat with her. He felt this now. "How unscrupulous good women seem sometimes!" he thought. He looked at her light, graceful figure, clear, smiling eyes, and all her dainty and elegant appointments, then went towards her, and laid his hand affectionately on her shoulder. "Don't use the Vivien woman in this matter, Folly," he repeated in his gentle yet masterful way. She laid her cheek against his hand with a pretty, caressing movement, then looked up, smiling and undisturbed.

"As you please, my dear."

She was still so like the slight little being in short, diaphanous draperies and a huge, rose-colored sash, whom he, as a school-boy, had swung up to his strong shoulder, proud of his burden and himself. She was still as clear-eyed and happy, as gracious and amiable, as simple and downright, in her relations with the few she cared for, as then; still as elusive when called upon to display any feeling stronger than a gentle, affectionate regard. Yet she was loyal to the core of her heart, and this her brother knew; and kindly and agreeable, and this the world knew.

"I am hard and exacting," he thought, blaming himself as usual. "Why demand of you what you have not to give, you dear and gracious being?

You simply did not understand; for you could not, sweet."

"Good little sister!" he said kindly, and went out.

Mrs. Raymond placidly painted on.

"Dear Sydney!" she thought, "he will always be fanciful. Now, why should I not ask a plain question of Mrs. Vivien? However," and she smiled with her little shrewd air of worldly wisdom, "it is immaterial. She will tell me, undoubtedly, all she knows without asking. She always unburdens her mind freely. I will not ask a question; but she shall help me find Sydney's people, nevertheless."

At this moment a servant entered with a card.

"Who is it, Elise?" Mrs. Raymond said carelessly.

"Mrs. Vivien, madame."

"Ah! Have her shown into the *salon*, and — wait, Elise. Did Mr. Sydney go out?"

"No, madame: he is in the library."

"Say to him that Mrs. Vivien is with me;" and Mrs. Raymond, with a perfectly adjusted smile of welcome, went in to greet her guest.

CHAPTER VIII.

"An acquaintance grilled, scored, devilled, and served with mustard and cayenne pepper, excites the appetite; whereas a slice of cold friend with currant jelly is but a sickly, unrelishing meat." — THACKERAY.

IN the large *salon* where Mrs. Raymond received only her most formal visitors, Mrs. Vivien's ingratiating purr, encouraged from time to time by an affable comment from her hostess, recounted the news of the day in Wynburg up to eleven A.M. With marvellous skill, obtained by strong natural ability increased by years of practice, Mrs. Vivien lightly touched upon topics which she hoped would interest her listener. Bird-like she darted to and fro, airily whirling and fluttering away from her position the instant she detected a shade of disapproval on the calm face opposite. Peculiar subjects, which she broadly expounded to Mrs. Lancaster with satisfaction to herself and her hearer, were, in Mrs. Raymond's refined presence, toned down to decency, playfully waived, or wholly ignored. Mrs. Vivien, communing with her own soul, was wont to gnash her teeth in impotent rage because she never fairly reached this favored child of fortune. Amiable, unruffled, gracious, Mrs. Raymond deigned to be amused, rarely committed herself by giving a

decided opinion, grew perceptibly colder if the conversation assumed a color too vivid for her taste, was gently obtuse to Mrs. Vivien's persistent efforts towards intimacy, and, after an acquaintance of two years, remained neither more nor less approachable than she had been the day they met. Mrs. Vivien perfectly appreciated this, and awaited her hour of reckoning.

"I'll find the weak spot in her armor yet," and she closed her thin lips firmly over her small milk-white teeth. She rarely did this in public. It was a comfort reserved for her dressing-room, like her *peignoir* and old slippers. She knew that slightly parted lips look innocent and young, and that compressing them draws hard lines far too early, destroying the witchery of dimple and curve, and making a woman age sadly.

She had Albani Cupids and Correggio's floating angel-heads painted on the walls of her pretty boudoir, and no doubt her studies of such artlessness were not without effect in producing her dewy, infantine smiles. There was much that she knew, this wise and foolish woman. She made use of many subtle arts and attenuated theories in the process of beautifying her not unpleasing person. But nevertheless, some simple and useful facts escaped her. She did not know, for instance, that a young heart holds the essence of youth in a woman's face in defiance of wrinkles and gray hair. She did not know that the world's imprint on her own spirit — dry and barren and common as a pub-

lic thoroughfare in midsummer — must sooner or later work itself out into her face, despite her cherubic studies.

In some lights indeed, to some eyes, this process had already taken place. Sydney Bruce, for one, found no charm in her practised smile, was never flattered by her gentle, appealing air, and invariably detected a malignant and sordid element in what to most people was the innocuous prattle of a pretty woman. Moreover, he had once seen in her face a fleeting resemblance to a person whom he had known, and upon whom he never wished to look again. This trifling discovery did not increase Mrs. Vivien's fascinations in his estimation.

To-day her prattle, harmless or otherwise, ran on in its happiest vein. She began with the court-bulletin, announcing the exact condition of the pale, stately queen's health. She reported that the king is about to pass a few days in a favorite villa. She alluded delicately to an impending engagement between two young people belonging to distinguished German families, in which Mrs. Raymond had the *entrée*, and she had not, and in regard to which Mrs. Raymond, who gave no hint of previous information, was far better informed than she. She rolled the sweet morsel of a church quarrel and scandal under her tongue. She regretted with voluble charity that three little American girls were guilty of laughing in their *loge* at the theatre last evening.

Mrs. Raymond, up to this point merely interposing conventional ahs and indeeds, here remarked, —

"Why, I thought everybody laughed at the theatre. I always do. That's why I go. I do not like tragedies."

"You can do any thing you please, dear Mrs. Raymond," was the suave answer; "and I wish I could tell you that it's all owing to your money," was the spiteful mental comment. "But you know the Germans do not like it."

"Oh, the poor Germans," laughed Mrs. Raymond. "How we foreigners accuse them of all manner of unrighteousness! For my part, I am sure that if we are not too severe upon peccadilloes in our ranks, they will not be. I have always found them well-disposed and kindly. Indeed, I am inclined to be grateful to them for putting up with a deal of nonsense from us intruders. And surely, Mrs. Vivien, we do not need to depend upon them when we wish to be enlivened by a racy bit of gossip."

"You are always so vivacious," returned Mrs. Vivien blandly. "How I wish I had your life and spirit! But as to these little Norrises" — .

"They are very nice girls," said Mrs. Raymond with decision. "Pretty, well-bred, always good tone."

"But it has been most unpleasantly commented upon, their laughing so much. I feel so sorry for their mother."

"Quarter to children!" exclaimed Mrs. Raymond good-humoredly. "Let us tear to tatters the reputations of our peers, but not slaughter the innocents. And do not pity Mrs. Norris, I beg," she added with

a peculiar smile. "She is not easily affected by trifles. And if her happy-hearted girls found something amusing in the play or even in the audience last night, I am sure they did not laugh loud. I am sure they disturbed no one. They are always fine, — the little Norrises."

"I quite agree with you," chimed in her visitor's dulcet tones. "I said at once, when I was told of it, that nothing is more pleasing to me than the light-heartedness of extreme youth. But the world is so censorious. Every thing is so easily misunderstood. Even a little innocent laughter people like to call coquetry and boldness. I am so glad, however, that you think there was nothing in it. I was sure you would look at the matter as I do," coos the gentle voice. "And how is Mr. Bruce?" she inquired sweetly. "We see so little of him. He is really quite a recluse."

"My brother is fond of pottering among his books," returned Mrs. Raymond indifferently. "And then he came only to be with us. He cares little for society in general."

"I presume he will make a long visit." Mrs. Vivien is aware this is an impolitic remark, but ventures it notwithstanding. In her abstruse calculations the length of Sydney Bruce's stay in Wynburg is an important factor.

His sister stared slightly, and said coldly, "I really do not know. I rarely question him as to his plans." Then, more genially, "Of course we shall keep him as long as possible. It is a pure delight

to Mr. Raymond and me to have him here, and the children adore him. He has half promised a friend in England to go over for some shooting, but I think he will come back."

"She's welcome to that bit of information," thought the bland hostess. "It's the first crumb of comfort she has been able to gather up."

"Ah, how delightful for you! Mr. Bruce, I must confess, is quite a hero to many of us;" and for once she spoke the truth. If there was a being for whom she entertained a feeling akin to genuine admiration, it was a rich young man. She was also not unsusceptible to graces of person and manner, and a strong social position was to her a crowning grace. Sydney Bruce was the careless but indisputable possessor of so many of these blessings, that she added to them the debatable boon of her deep interest.

"I was told they used to call him the Cid years ago at college, he was such a hero." Mrs. Raymond looked at her oddly. "How did you ever know that, I wonder? Do you happen to know when he cut his first tooth?" she was thinking; and Mrs. Vivien's instinct warned her to drop this interesting theme.

"Speaking of heroes reminds me of Miss Gray — clever person — pity she is so plain. They say she is writing three novels at once, and does not mind in the least how many people and how much noise and confusion there are in her study."

"That *is* clever," and Mrs. Raymond laughed heartily. "But, pray, has any one read her MSS.?

Or does the feat consist simply in writing under such circumstances without reference to finding a publisher? How does she keep her heroes from walking into the wrong book and making love to the wrong heroine?"

"But that would be very true to nature," remarked Mrs. Vivien demurely. "Men so often make love to the wrong heroine. By the way, we are watching a romance at Frau Rudolph's just now. You know Lieut. von Falkenstein? He and Miss Peyton are having quite an affair, I am sorry to say."

"Miss Peyton? She's the pale, pretty girl with the exquisite voice, is she not? I heard her sing at Lady Manners's charity concert. I thought her charming."

"Yes, so she is, most charming," enthusiastically. "That is why we are especially sorry to see her going on in this way. Flowers, and evening rambles, and heaven knows what."

"I think I'll ask Miss Peyton here," said Mrs. Raymond, fixing her eyes with a gentle, abstracted air upon the long trumpet of the Fra Angelico angel in the corner of her room.

Mrs. Vivien's lips closed, almost with a snap. Recovering herself, —

"I have always liked her. I really never know why most people do not. She is more to be pitied than blamed," she adds, with inconceivable malice and her meekest voice.

"I shall certainly ask Miss Peyton here," said Mrs. Raymond, even more gently than before, still

looking upward to the calm eyes of the angel, "next Wednesday — with Lady Manners — to dine."

Baffled and venomous, Mrs. Vivien summoned all her art to make a gallant retreat. The dewy, cherub smile hovers over her lips as she murmurs, "That is really quite too sweet of you, dear Mrs. Raymond. Always so benevolent! The poor girl ought to be grateful, indeed, and just at this time too! I do so envy you your charming home. It gives you such freedom in the matter of entertaining. Now, it is very different in a *pension*, believe me. There it doesn't do to be original, eccentric shall I say? I often write to Mr. Vivien that he really must come over and take a house here. The climate agrees so well with my poor chest," she explained, with a look of pious gratitude for Heaven's mercy in leading her to this salubrious spot, "but he never feels as if he could leave his business. Perhaps he will sometime," she concludes, with a bright hopefulness delightful to observe.

Mrs. Raymond honestly admired her. "This is really well played. Extraordinary vivacity and grace," she thought, "since Mr. Vivien and Mrs. Vivien's weak chest are generally conceded myths, — companion myths, one never appearing in her conversation without the other."

Taking refuge in a harmless generality she responded, "Our business men ought to allow themselves more rest. Americans are apt to be slaves to their work, and wear themselves out."

"That's what I am always telling Mr. Vivien,"

purrs the artless voice. "When he comes he will want a home. He is very fond of his home."

"Good heavens!" was Mrs. Raymond's inward ejaculation. "What effrontery!"

"He would never put up with the inconveniences of *pension*-life, though to be sure we are very comfortable at Frau Rudolph's. We have some new people, by the way; but perhaps you knew it?"

"I know very little of strangers, except what you are kind enough to tell me," was the equivocal answer.

"I merely thought you might know them, because they know friends of yours. It's a Miss Lennox and her niece. They have very good connections, it seems. Sedate old Northbrooke families, — Weatherstone — Wellesley — Lennox, — you know. The niece is engaged to her cousin, young Thornton of Fairport. Family arrangement, they say. Miss Lennox is rather peculiar. Nice person, no doubt, but free in her ideas, I should say. It always frightens poor little me when women begin to advance theories: I tremble lest they should go too far, and become unwomanly. Mr. Vivien has a horror of the least approach to emancipation. He thinks it so coarse. She is extremely enterprising for her years, I must admit. She goes everywhere with her niece. They actually started off to market this morning."

"Ah? It will be pleasant for you to have such agreeable people at Frau Rudolph's," Mrs. Raymond responded with extreme urbanity.

"Delightful. Especially as I know who they are.

One cannot be too careful over here, so many refined-looking women are mere adventuresses. But these are of our own kind." She furtively watched the effect of this audacious master-stroke, but her hostess remained civilly imperturbable. "My cousin Eleanor has written all about them," she added softly.

"Eleanor!" There was a startled expression in Mrs. Raymond's eyes.

"Check!" thought the smiling little woman before her. "You have given me several thrusts this morning, my gracious lady. Take this now: there is more to come."

"Eleanor who? What Eleanor?" trembled on Florence Raymond's tongue, but this at least she would not inquire of Mrs. Vivien. "The name may be a mere coincidence. Yet her *trainante* voice and drooping lids have always seemed faintly familiar. Cousins, are they? Well, it can do no harm, only be disagreeable. I am foolish to attach any importance to it. But the very name disturbs me. As if my strong brother could be reached again by that false creature. And yet men are unaccountable."

All this flashed through her mind. With scarcely a perceptible pause, she replied in her most charming manner, —

"I shall be pleased to know them."

"I am sure you will," purred the pretty cat. "But, dear Mrs. Raymond, I must really run away. I have stolen such an unconscionable amount of your time! Indeed, I always forget how the moments are

flying, when I sit here with you. But, as I often say to dear Lady Manners, 'What would life be, without a friendly chat now and then?' Good-morning, dear Mrs. Raymond. I have enjoyed you so very much," and she glided softly away.

CHAPTER IX.

"Love, we are told, comes like the wind, from heaven,
Not at our bidding, but its own free will."

BULWER.

WHILE Mrs. Vivien was displaying her motley *hautes nouveautés* of gossip, across the hall in the dim, rich, silent library, Sydney Bruce sat in a profound reverie. He scarcely lifted his eyes from the Persian rug at his feet when Elise, with the noiseless tread of a perfect servant, brought him his sister's warning. As the name of the visitor was announced, an almost imperceptible look of aversion crept into his quiet eyes, then vanished. It was as if an ugly snake had glided into a dream of paradise and disappeared, leaving no trace or remembrance. The door softly closed. He was again alone with his thoughts. Strange thoughts they were, wild and ardent as any boy's, behind the grave composure of his face and his steady eyes.

"She would sit near me in the old library at home, close to me," and his heart gave a mighty bound of gladness; "her hand on my shoulder, — she has such dainty hands; her pure cheek against mine; and I should turn, and see my book no more, but only her sweet, primrose face, and the happy light in her eyes. And I would kiss them, the great

innocent eyes! Thank God there are still such eyes in the world and such women! And sometimes she would be in the high carved chair by the window, her head thrown back, her hands softly folded. And the crimson and violet lights from the painted panes would fall so lovingly upon her, that I should be jealous of even old Chaucer and Shakespeare for daring to send down their glories to gleam in her hair, lie on her breast, and tremble over her lovely throat. My child! My little love! How she came along towards me this morning in the full sunlight, proud and pure and radiant; and I knew her and loved her. And then she turned and spoke, and smiled in the face of the white-haired old lady, and laid her hands gently on the other's wrists with an exquisite deference, the unconscious grace of a child, and a great, sweet trust shining in her eyes.

"Will she ever come to me with the trust in her eyes, and lay her hands in mine? Loving, loyal, strong heart! Proud, fearless, true heart! I have been blind enough in my life, am blind still no doubt, but not so blind that I fail to recognize *you*, coming towards me in the sunlight, coming on, straight into my life, never again to leave it! For should I never see you again, or should you not listen to me, still I know you, dear. I know you for what you are. Whether I gain or lose you, you are still the one woman in the world for me. You are she for whom I have always been seeking ever since my boyish heart felt its first strange

yearning for something higher and better than it had known, — for a woman's love.

"I have known so many women, but not one like you. I have grown old before my time; but the sight of you shuts out all the dull years, and fills me with the hopes of strong, sweet youth. I have wasted so much on others. Can you forgive me, sweet? I should have known you were coming. I should have waited. I was blind. Yet not to one of them have I offered what I lay before the shrine of your white soul; and if there has been folly, weakness, madness, in my past, there has been no dishonor. At least, I can meet your calm eyes. And I can love you with a man's strong love, and only you, until I die. To-day I see you in the glory of your girlhood. With closed eyes, I see you, too, fifty years from now. You will not think it a wrong to your beauty and your youth that this picture comes stealing into my heart? A little, quaint old lady, frail and bowed, and with a white cap round the gentle face. The flower-like head has lost its loftiness, the wealth of hair its radiance, the warm lips their soft, quivering charm. But still, in the dimmed eyes are the lovelight and the truth; and still I love you, dear. Let the change come, since come it must. I do not fear it with you near me. I shall love you, not with this fast-beating heart and intensity of longing, since these, too, must suffer a change, like your fairness, yet with the same reverence as now, with the honor and high thoughts which your pure presence inspires, and

with the tenderness that deepens and strengthens with years. I promise this.

"Ah! I thought the last of this race of women died when my mother died, — the grand, sweet women, lofty in life and love, yet with the unsullied child-soul always looking out through their beautiful eyes. And now I have found you, my child, my love, my wife; and I will never let you go again through all the years to come.

"To think I did not know you quite! The grace, the morning freshness, yes; but where I had met you, I could not tell. When I saw you, and it was only in June, I did not know you were so tall and stately, dear. I thought you a little girl," and he smiled gently. "And to-day you turned your head, and it drooped low over the flowers; and I suddenly saw your profile, clear-cut as a cameo, with the green leaves behind you. And all at once you seemed to be sobbing, and clinging to your horse in the heart of the old New-England wood again. I wanted to take you in my arms and comfort you then. I want to comfort you in the future for every sorrow that may bow your dear head. I will, if I may. I will yet, if I may;" and a flood of reverence and protecting tenderness swept through his heart like a torrent.

"I love you," said this grave man with the self-contained face, and the wild, delicious fancies running riot through his brain. "Am I too old for you?" The thought was keen pain to him. "Ah, I cannot lose you, now that I know you! I

love all your little ways. How eloquent they are! and your hands, your light, impulsive movements, your face with its tremulous, sensitive changes. Was ever a face before playful and demure, loving, wistful, flashing with merriment, eager, calm as a statue, all in one fleeting moment?

"And you did not know me, did not see me? Not you, my pure, proud lily! What matters it to you what stranger watches when you pass by in your girlish state! Little do you care for admiration in men's eyes. You hardly know that men have eyes!" and a great triumph shone in his own.

At last. At last. He did not ask himself how he knew, how he was so sure of this simple little girl, this stranger. His faith in her, his instinctive comprehension of her, occasioned him no self-examination.

"She is untainted by the world. She scorns a lie, as an honest man does, and as few women I have known do, if they can sugar-coat it sufficiently to render it palatable to what they call their consciences. She is too fearless ever to be false. She cannot use mean tools to accomplish her purposes. She is upright, downright. She is all graciousness, with a quaint, old-fashioned dignity she has caught from that most charming gentlewoman with her. In her clear eyes no love-thought has ever dwelt; but one day her strong, sweet, ardent spirit will give itself wholly — and to me — to me!" his heart cried passionately. "I must win her for my wife — mine — this girl with the eyes of a child and the

heart of a woman, this brave, beautiful, tender soul."

It is evident that Mr. Sydney Bruce was in love, very much in love.

To him the old market had suddenly grown as dazzling as the golden streets of the New Jerusalem. The little procession, winding its way in and out among butter-women, baskets of eggs, mounds of vegetables, the late roses and the noisy chatter of the peasant-throng, was as glorious in his eyes as a vision of sweetly-singing seraphs, sweeping over shining mountain-tops. Even Bäbele, the portly maid, harmonious and etherialized, walked on in the universal glamour, carrying a sublimated market-basket. The staid, high-gabled houses near by were gradually transforming themselves into structures more beautiful than Greek temples, the chestnut-trees by the old castle, chilled as they already were by the night-frosts of late October, were putting forth rosy blossom and leaf as in the merry month of May, when Mrs. Raymond, unconscious of these phenomena, hurried into the room.

"She is gone, Sydney."

"So I presume, since I have the pleasure of seeing you. She was considerate enough not to stay long."

"Why, I thought she would never go. She was here nearly an hour," said Mrs. Raymond, surprised. "What are you reading that makes the time pass so quickly? Tyndall still? Ah! here is Grotius' 'Law of Nations.'" She looked at her brother in

fond admiration, her eyes saying, "How clever you are to lose yourself in such dry tomes!"

Sydney smiled.

"The law can be very engrossing," he said soberly. "But I have had other things to consider."

"Profitable things, no doubt," she replied kindly. "As for me, I have simply wasted a precious hour. You are right about Mrs. Vivien, Sydney: she's a perfect trail-of-the-serpent. I will never listen to her again."

"Until you see her again," he thought.

She went on, "I know who your old lady is. Indeed, I did not ask," she added hastily.

"I am sure you did not," was the hearty response.

"Her name is Lennox, and she has letters of introduction to me. I presume she will call."

Her brother watched her as she closed a portfolio on the writing-table, and put some scattered pens in their places. He then gently suggested, —

"Perhaps, as she's an elderly lady, you might make an exception, and call first upon her."

"I have not the least objection in the world," she said carelessly. Then, laughing, "Shall I take you along to pay your respects to your white-haired lady-love?"

"Certainly, if you like."

"Now, that's really kind!" she exclaimed, delighted whenever she could induce her usually reluctant brother to pay a visit. "Shall we go to-morrow, or Saturday?"

"I am engaged to-morrow and Saturday," said Sydney with deliberation.

"Next week, then?"

"I am engaged next week."

"But can you go to-day?"

"If you wish."

"Very well, just after lunch."

She left the room. Moved by a sudden thought, she came swiftly back, and, standing on the threshold, said, —

"Sydney, there's a niece."

"Ah!"

"Yes: Mrs. Vivien said so. Did you happen to see the niece at the market this morning, Sydney?"

"I may have seen her," looking at his sister with candid, indifferent eyes. "I told you that I saw two young girls and two children. Do you know if the niece wears a long braided flaxen tail hanging down her back?"

"Perhaps it's the other young girl," thought Mrs. Raymond, somewhat puzzled. "It is somebody, I am sure. No one ever heard of a man's falling in love with an old woman unless she were a Ninon de l'Enclos or some such person. And yet I do not know that any thing could surprise me much in Sydney."

CHAPTER X.

"One of the golden half-hours which are flying about all over the world had come to them. They had done nothing to deserve it, but it was there." — MISS THACKERAY.

EIGHT days under Frau Rudolph's roof had been sufficient to give aunt Serena a tolerably clear idea of the condition of things, and to fill her gentle soul with wonder, often with weariness. "It is not the atmosphere I would have chosen for Rosamond," she said to herself; "but I do not think it will harm the child to catch a glimpse of a kind of life different from that which she has known. I should certainly never wish her to feel sufficiently acclimated to be at home in it; and there is no danger of that," smiling, and remembering Rose's high scorn of what she called "their stabs in the dark," her habitual difficulty in keeping her temper in Mrs. Vivien's presence, her keen temptation to regale that lady with a free expression of opinion. "No, it will not hurt the child; and she will grow calmer and stronger. She will learn to disregard it. It seems to me desirable for a young girl to learn as soon as possible to disregard common chatter," mused the peaceful old lady, unconscious that this sentiment would be regarded by many excellent persons as little less than revolutionary. "We will

stay here for the present. The rooms are pleasant. Rose will be interested in her German and music and Gertrude. In the spring we will make some change. A little friction from the outside world will do my Rose no harm. I am a dull old being, who makes things too soft for her. Let them irritate her. She will learn how to meet them." So they decided to remain through the winter at Frau Rudolph's; and every day Rose flushed, and felt ill at ease, and inclined to do battle for each name that was slightingly mentioned in her presence, whether she knew the rights and wrongs of the case or not. She was often on the point of gallantly defending the most notorious reprobates in Wynburg. If Mrs. Lancaster's ponderous principles were arrayed against a fellow-mortal, if gentle Mrs. Vivien smeared him with honeyed poison, Rosamond was eager to throw down her clean little gauntlet for him, and challenge the whole world; yet she restrained herself bravely. She knew her aunt's disapproval of scenes, and, recognizing with considerable reluctance the impropriety of rebuking her elders, maintained an uneasy silence. Yet, since the strong flash of young eyes, and the indignant flush on a pure cheek, are more eloquent than words, her heroic reticence served by no means as a disguise for her thoughts, and gained for her, at least from Mrs. Vivien, little good-will. Aunt Serena herself was not an enormous restraint. She had no vocation for public preaching or active missionary work. There were some things, to be sure, one could not

say to her, because she either did not know, or seemed not to know, what they meant. But, upon the whole, the table-talk ran on in a somewhat turbid current after, as before, her advent. She contented herself with dexterously leading it now and then into a new channel without apparently opposing it; and often a humorous observation from her would have a happy effect in causing a burst of light laughter, which would clear the heavy, lurid atmosphere. She never seemed to listen with the slightest interest to a gossipy story; and her little air of civility was so evidently for the speaker, and not for his theme, that this also was sometimes mildly repressive. She talked with Rose cheerily upon subjects that interested her, drawing Gertrude Peyton, the shy students, and even the twins, into the conversation, so that the new element at the table was at least perceptible. Still, as she herself very accurately reasoned, these were nearly all thoroughly seasoned souls; at all events, too old to be easily trained in new directions. She, therefore, was kind to all, and harmless and wise, and did not try to make the crooked straight, but only to keep the straight from becoming crooked.

"God save me from living in so small a world!" cried Rose passionately, as they came in from dinner one day, after an unusually brilliant and varied dissertation from Mrs. Vivien. It was the Thursday she had been to see Mrs. Raymond, and having had the benefit of a rehearsal, played her part marvellously well. All her stories gained

flavor with repetition, and Mrs. Raymond's elegant repose of manner would have been for once sadly shaken had she known how she figured in the sparkling recital. There had been so very much of it, even Miss Lennox looked weary and pained; and Rose's impetuous spirit had long since flung out its crimson banners of protest and defiance, when aunt and niece withdrew.

"God save me from living in so small a world!" exclaimed Rose, holding herself erect, and throwing up her head as if to draw a freer breath.

"Amen!" said the old lady softly, making no further comment.

Rose paced the room, at first swiftly, gradually with less vehemence, then suddenly stopped, with a little apologetic laugh.

"Of course I know I am too foolish to be so excited about things that do not concern me," she remarked.

"It would seem so, dear."

"But that woman,—I have never known any thing like her. She makes my head feel like a kaleidoscope. Aunt Harriet is bad enough, but even she is not mean."

"That is true," said Miss Lennox cordially. "She has never been fond of petty gossip. She is too strong for that."

Some one knocked; and Gertrude came rapidly in, more joyous than her wont, and with a faint color in her cheeks. She carried a large music-roll.

Rosamond sprang eagerly to welcome her.

"I am so glad! We missed you at dinner. Where were you? We had roast chicken and — vivisection."

"I was at the Conservatory rehearsal. I had to play my concerto and sing: you know the concert is next week. They praised me; and I have come back 'puffed up with majestick pride,' like Walter Scott's 'Maidie.' And I have been spared the vivisection. I suppose you mean the Vivien woman's," she said contemptuously.

"Have you had any thing to eat, my dear?" was aunt Serena's pertinent inquiry.

"Oh, yes;" and Gertrude smiled gratefully. It was delicious to feel that anybody cared whether she was hungry or not. "Frau Rudolph gave me a princely lunch at twelve. She is a good old soul." The girl's face looked younger and softer than when they first saw her.

"Frau Rudolph is a beautiful product of a high civilization," said Rose, taking Gertrude's hands affectionately. "But I am a savage of the Western wilds. Perhaps if you would sing to me it would have a humanizing effect."

And Gertrude sang. As her strong, sweet contralto voice filled the room, peace descended upon it. They forgot the small and ignoble. They ceased to hear the jarring world-noises. "It is like the Song of Life of the young Sun-god," thought Rose. She was half kneeling on cushions at her aunt's feet in the recessed window. She looked up at the steep red roofs. The sun streamed down warmly upon

them. The sky looked far off, cloudless, and calm. "It is not worth while to care about the other things," she thought. "They are not real. These are the real things, — love and faith and nobleness. These are life." Her eyes grew moist: she laid her head on aunt Serena's knee. Gertrude sang on. There was an exultant ring in her voice to-day, — a pæan of victory.

She paused, struck a few fitful chords, and began in a different strain.

„Herr, ſchütze mich vor ihm,"

she sang, in a low, passionate voice. Masini's love-song, more than two centuries old, came welling up from the depths of her heart; and little, untried, innocent Rose trembled, responsive to its power and pathos.

"For his eyes haunt me, his sweet voice stirs my soul," moans the woman's wounded heart. "I cannot resist him, yet I dare not listen to him. Lord, do thou save me from him, that he may never love me."

„Herr, ſchütze mich vor ihm,
Daß er mich nur nicht liebt."

and the prayer rang out in a wild abandonment of love and pain.

"Thou alone seest my tears when his eye smiles upon me, when but his light breath touches me. Thou knowest my rapture and my woe."

No wonder then that they heard no knock. Frau Rudolph bustled in, in her usual cheery fashion,

bringing cards and ushering in visitors simultaneously. "Mrs. Raymond and Mr. Sydney Bruce," she announced.

Miss Lennox, in whose delicate cheeks the music had brought a sweet flush, went quickly forward to greet her guests; and Rose followed with a rapt softness on her face, the passionate prayer of the old love-song still echoing in her ears.

"She is lovelier so," thought Sydney, as the grave ceremonies of presentation took place. "She is adorable." Gertrude rose, but remained behind the piano, stiff, and coldly on guard, until aunt Serena's gentle voice called, —

"Miss Peyton! Mrs. Raymond, let me introduce our friend Miss Peyton, our first friend in Wynburg," she added sweetly. Rose had solemnly resolved at dinner never to like this much-talked-of Mrs. Raymond. Any person to whom Mrs. Vivien constantly and familiarly alluded as an intimate friend, was, in Rose's opinion, irreparably compromised. But the grace and unaffected cordiality with which Mrs. Raymond extended her hand to Miss Peyton, remembering distinctly where they had met and the pleasure her beautiful voice had given, completely disarmed Gertrude's gallant champion.

Her sudden look of delight did not escape Sydney, whose observant eyes saw, without seeming to see, every change of color, every shade of feeling, on her lovely, varying face.

The conversation began naturally with the morning meeting at the market, then, on the part of the

two older ladies, wandered off from Wynburg to people and things at home; while Mr. Bruce, turning to Miss Peyton, talked of her music with a sympathetic knowledge of the subject and a deference to her opinions which made Rosamond ecstatic. She was so used to feeling indignant on Gertrude's account that this perfect courtesy seemed an enchanting thing to her. She was more than content to sit quietly near, and see Gertrude appreciated. At every bright, pertinent remark made by Miss Peyton, Rosamond would look Mr. Bruce full in the face, to be sure that it was not lost upon him. "Is she not charming?" her unconscious eyes were continually asking; and his manner, with its grave and kind response, expressed such approval of her friend, that Rose began to feel that this Mr. Sydney Bruce was a person of extraordinary discernment. She had instinctive confidence in him. It seemed as if she had always known him. There was something natural in listening to him and Gertrude. It was as if she had been doing only that for ages. She felt very gentle and calm and at rest, and was quite unaware that she was telegraphing every emotion to him. How pretty and dainty Gertrude was, and how cleverly she was talking. What a strong, fine head Mr. Bruce had. She scrutinized it with undisguised interest. What picture was it like? She held her own pretty little head on one side as she attentively studied his. Her face was as soft, fresh, innocent, and untroubled as a happy child's. He turned, and met her eyes. "You are wondering if we have met before to-day, Miss Wellesley?"

"No," she said simply. "I remember you perfectly. I saw you at Northbrooke once."

"I saw you at Northbrooke more than once."

"I did not know that," she said brightly.

"Once by the school. Once you were riding. And still another time I saw you." He spoke gently and gravely.

"Ah," sighed Rose, "then you must have seen my beautiful Aloha."

"Yes, I saw him."

"Is that your horse?" asked Gertrude. "What an odd, pretty name."

"It means 'Love to you,'" explained Rose seriously, looking first at Gertrude, then at Sydney. "Aloha — Love to you," she repeated, lingering a little on the soft words, and looking him innocently in the face. There was a sudden gleam in his eyes.

"It is Hawaiian," she went on. "It is the greeting in the Sandwich Islands. Is it not sweeter than all other greetings in the world? *Aloha* is the common daily greeting, you know. It is used carelessly, a gentleman from the islands told me, like our good-morning or good-by; but the word expresses affection and kindness, not with precision, but vaguely — deliciously. It is like the fragrance of a flower, not the flower itself. The peasant may say it to the king, and the king to the peasant. Then, there is *Aloha nui*. That is a little nearer and dearer. And *Aloha nui loa* means all that can be expressed of love, reverence, intimacy, and devo-

tion. Aloha's real name is Aloha Nui Loa," she added soberly. "But I only call him that on very solemn occasions."

"When you bade him farewell, I presume," said Mr. Bruce.

"Yes," she said quickly. "But how could you know? I cried," she confessed in her child-like way. "I went out to his stable the morning we left. I put my arms round his neck, and cried, and talked to him, and kissed him good-by. It was my one grief in coming away. I knew he understood. I am sure he misses me," and she looked to Sydney for confirmation.

"Unquestionably," he responded with strong emphasis. "But, Miss Wellesley, your farewell to Aloha reminds me of a German legend in which there is also a maiden who loved her beautiful horse, and stole into his stall before dawn to tell him her troubles."

"Did he help her?" Rose asked in good faith. "Aloha has often given me good advice."

"He did more than that; and her griefs were greater than yours, I think," he said soberly. "Shall I tell you about it?"

"Why, this is idyllic," thought Mrs. Raymond, amused, hearing the last remarks. "My reticent brother telling fairy-tales to youth."

"According to the poem, the maiden steals into his stall before dawn, like you, Miss Wellesley," Mr. Bruce related. "Her horse has a silver bridle. He is shod with pure gold, and his girth is edged with pearls."

"Aloha is a philosopher. He would not care for finery," Rose commented with dignity.

"She combs his mane with a golden comb, and braids it with pearls," Sydney went on. "She makes a cup of her little white hand, and he drinks rich Burgundy wine from it."

"Miss Wellesley's hand would make a tantalizing cup for an animal consumed with thirst," laughed Gertrude.

Rose wrinkled up her soft palm with an air of satisfaction.

"It's a very good cup," she said. Sydney scrutinized it as if he were merely considering its practical utility. "If she holds it out a moment longer I shall kiss it," he thought; and the queer little flash came in his eyes again.

"A man does not look like that for nothing," mused wise Gertrude. "But if I had not seen it twice, I should think I was dreaming, he is so strong and calm."

"I will try the Burgundy," said the unconscious Rose. "I hope Aloha will like it, it sounds so poetical. He is very partial to sugar, and, I fear it is a plebeian taste, to carrots."

"This horse drinks rich, red Burgundy wine from his mistress's hand," the faithful chronicler continued. "Then she throws her arm round his neck, lays her cheek against him; and her warm tears flow fast."

"That is like me," nodded Rosamond.

"His head droops lovingly."

"Like Aloha," she said softly.

"And she whispers to him all her griefs."

„Mein ſtolzes Roß, mein treues Roß,
Dir klage ich all mein Leid."

"'I tell thee all my woes,' she says. 'They will force me to marry the false and hated man. My fleet, strong steed, my noble steed, save me this day or never.' And the horse, in his wrath, breaks asunder his golden halter, then bends his slender knee before his mistress, looks long at her with imploring eyes full of undreamed-of meaning, and lays his head at her feet. She kisses him, murmuring, 'O save me, my faithful one!' and springs into the saddle."

"That is all like Aloha," cried Rose with tender enthusiasm.

Sydney smiled kindly.

The two other ladies were now listening with much amusement.

"Then, through the gray morning twilight they fled. They leave behind them," says the poem, "the swallow in his swiftest flight; and the angry storm, riding above on the clouds, is powerless to overtake them. The marvellous horse never relaxes his speed. They reach the dark elfin-wood. They reach the diamond elfin-castle. In the court the horse bends his knee, and waits motionless for his mistress to dismount. As she throws her arms round him once more, to thank him and bless him for saving her, she finds herself clasping the beautiful prince of the elves, who makes her his bride.

"Oh," exclaimed Rose, with real disappointment in her voice, "but she lost her horse."

They all laughed.

"You think a fairy prince a poor exchange, Miss Wellesley," remarked Mrs. Raymond.

"Yes, for such a horse as that or Aloha," Rose answered quite earnestly.

"Perhaps we might make a compromise," suggested Mrs. Raymond. "His elfin highness in gracious mood may transform himself now and then into the form in which he so long served his lady-love."

"But then she would lose her prince," said Rose.

"You are really very difficult, Miss Wellesley," remarked Sydney. "Pray, how would you like the story to end?"

Rose laughed. "I would have the maiden keep her horse and find her prince."

"That is less poetical," persisted Mr. Bruce; "but it may be possible to arrange it."

"Please try," said Rose gayly. "You have said enough already to make me feel very shy towards Aloha. I am sure I shall approach him with trepidation, until he convinces me there is nothing supernatural about him."

"I will answer for Aloha's pedigree, my dear," remarked her aunt. "He comes of staid, respectable English stock, with a racer or two among his distinguished sires, but no elves. His family would feel horrified and insulted at so wild a suggestion."

"We must arrange some rides," said Mrs. Raymond affably. "My Pearl is not your Aloha, Miss Wellesley; but she is a very good animal." Rose thanked her with unfeigned delight. "And you ride too, Miss Peyton?"

Gertrude colored. "I have ridden — years ago," — she said "at home, — but never here."

"Then it is quite time you should begin again," returned Mrs. Raymond with friendly tyranny. "Mephisto will do," she added, as Gertrude smiled. Oh, do not think he snorts fire and brimstone. He is far less fiery than Pearl, to tell the truth. But that's one of the inconsistencies of life. Things and people so rarely have appropriate names," she said lightly, rising to go.

"Oh, do not say no!" she begged, as Gertrude was about to speak. "I have set my heart on some riding parties. There are delightful roads about here, and sometimes we can ride till Christmas. This fall promises well, it is so mild. But we will arrange every thing later. Mind you do not disappoint me, Miss Peyton."

"I beg you will not disappoint my sister or me, Miss Peyton," said Sydney in his kind, grave way. "She has not mentioned me. She takes me for granted. But it is only fair to tell you that she means me to go."

"I thank you both. I will consider it," said Gertrude, hesitating and troubled. Then, "I will talk with Miss Lennox about it," she added with more decision, "and I shall be glad to do what she thinks best."

Aunt Serena, with an air of ownership, drew the young girl's hand within her arm.

Rosamond's quick glance at Sydney said, "See how things trouble this poor, dear Gertrude."

"I know it all," was his silent, sympathetic response.

"Lovely beings," said Rose, as the door closed. "I bask in their sunshine."

"Mrs. Vivien cannot reach you now," said Gertrude.

"My dear," replied Rose, "you are going to ride Mephisto, and I am going to ride Pearl. I am scarcely aware that Mrs. Vivien exists."

Gertrude smiled a little sadly.

"I have promised Mrs. Raymond," remarked aunt Serena, watching her narrowly, "to return her visit immediately, this very week, and to bring you both. You can come with us Saturday, can you not? She is a most charming woman, and you seem to have quite won her heart:" she patted Gertrude's hand affectionately.

"You are all angels," exclaimed the girl, and abruptly left the room.

CHAPTER XI.

"Why should he stay, whom love doth press to go?"
Midsummer-Night's Dream.

"Her throat was serpent, but the words she spake
Came as through bubbling honey."
KEATS.

AUNT SERENA with quietly folded hands sat waiting for Rose and coffee. Miss Lennox was an early riser. She liked a still half-hour with herself before the day seized her, and gave her to other people. Some of the long casements were flung wide open. The room had too many windows: it was audaciously opposed to architectural rules. But, like certain music full of forbidden consecutive fifths, like a pretty woman with flagrantly irregular features, it nevertheless succeeded in being charming. The sunshine streamed in boldly on the table laid for breakfast, gave an added lustre to Frau Rudolph's stout little silver cream-pitcher, and tried the effect of an aureole round aunt Serena's saint-like head. In the freshness of the morning there was no chill.

"If this is our bleak November translated into German, I like it," she mused. "I suppose the wind has already begun its fall symphony in my high-crested oaks. How I love all the sweet, mel-

ancholy voices of the Nest! Yet it is well that we came here: it is well." She looked up with an ineffably sweet smile, as if communing with unseen angels. She often wore this look in her still half-hours. She was thinking of Rosamond in all her rich fulness of life. She was with her own dead, beautiful past.

"My dear ones, my dear lost ones, I would have your approval of my guidance of our child. That is my aspiration. That has ever been my aim. You, my sister, you, my brother, and you, my noblest and strongest, whom I lost when we were young, dim ages ago. Ah, I thought the great world was dead, because one poor stricken heart staggered under its burden. Yet the world slowly grew alive again, — as it always does if one waits. First I heard without pain the rippling joy in my sister's voice, and next I found myself watching the opening leaves; and I knew my world was not dead, only cold and torpid. Then, after years, my little Rose breathed upon it with her balmy, baby breath, and filled it with warmth and fragrance; and with her growing life, my life became beautiful. She has grown in freedom, that her spirit might develop as nature willed. She has been aided, never forced or stunted. She is strong and upright. She is loving and pitiful, and ah, so sweet a sight to my old eyes! But it is a solemn thing to guide a young soul. Dear ones, without you all, I could not have done it. I have kept you near. I have thought your thoughts. You have lived on in my life.

You live on in our child's. I have been only your steward. I have cared for your priceless treasure.

"And now I am looking back on her happy years of girlhood, and almost bidding them farewell for her, the bright, glad years. A larger life is dawning before her, though she does not know. Her young eyes do not discern the rosy signs of promise. But I have seen. The fairy tale has begun. The old godmother sees the true prince. The prince sees the maiden. The maiden is a happy, simple thing, and sees only the cowslips in her path. Who knows if she will look up? Yet such a wooer rarely woos in vain. He talked with Gertrude, but he watched my Rose. There she is, my bonny little cowslip girl!"

Rose came lightly in, her bright face all aglow, and bent her pretty head for her morning kiss. Presently buxom Bäbele appeared with the coffee and some letters.

"Two for you, and an elephantine one for me from Harold. I wonder what he has to say for himself;" and Rose, taking her place at the little table opposite her aunt, opened her large, thick letter with no frantic signs of haste.

But her interest evidently increased with the reading, and her face changed constantly. She puckered up her mouth like a bewildered child, smiled, dimpled, frowned, and finally exclaimed, —

"Aunt Serena, that boy is actually coming!"

Miss Lennox glanced up composedly from a

mournful letter from her trusty John, whose views, always sufficiently pessimistic, were now, owing to her absence, tinged with black despair. The only gleam of cheerfulness which enlivened his atrabilious production was apparent in his account of a certain widow Tompkins's dissatisfaction with the flannels provided for her winter-wear by Miss Lennox. "You tell her," says she, — and John with punctilious exactness delivers the woman's ungracious message to her benefactor, — "You tell her I don't say them flannels ain't better'n nothin', but I do say they ain't what I kalkerlated they was a-goin' to be." Taught by long experience with indigent fellow-creatures, Miss Lennox knew gratitude to be rather an attribute of the well-born soul than of the chronic pauper, and never counted in the least upon it in her many benevolent schemes. "Why should they be grateful?" she thought: "I do not believe I should be in their circumstances." She also reasoned that widow Tompkins, when a flannel-less person, had idealized the coveted good. Attaining it after a life-time of longing, possession had cooled her ardor. "The main thing is, that they keep her rheumatic old bones warm," reflected sensible aunt Serena, finding nothing unnatural in the widow's sentiments. "But," raising her eyebrows doubtfully, "why my old John should fairly gloat over her discontent, and luxuriate in the wrath with which she regards me and my humble offerings, I cannot imagine;" and meditating with puzzled amusement upon this intricacy of human nature, she

had about concluded that it was quite beyond the reach of her innocent philosophic probings, when Rose spoke.

"He is not coming yet, of course," Miss Lennox answered with calm conviction, her mind still dwelling on the involved Tompkins problem.

"But he is, aunt Serena;" and Rose laughed, yet looked a little indignant. "He is coming immediately. That is the extraordinary part of it. It is the craziest possible letter. Do read it."

Aunt Serena put on her spectacles, and read.

The letter bubbled over with animal spirits, and was an extravagant recital of what the writer seemed to consider a three-months' campaign, and final glorious victory, — the strictly historical narrative being frequently interpolated with little bursts of eager boyish affection for Rose.

Harold began by solemnly expressing the hope that Rose might at last be convinced of the earnestness and depth of his feelings, since, when the letter reached her, he would already be on his way to Wynburg. Life away from her was worthless. He thought of her days and dreamed of her nights, in short, could not exist without her. Then, abruptly ceasing his amorous plaint, with suppressed exultation he begged her and dear, kind aunt Serena not to be horrified to learn that he was "suspended." He had to do it himself, he ingenuously assured them, because he could not manage the thing in any other way. He was determined to come to Rose, and his mother absolutely refused to let him go before

commencement. "When he had left college, he could travel; not before." Here Rose figured as his guiding-star, and there was a short paragraph of fine writing. Resuming his direct narrative, he related his arguments with his mother, and their futility. His faculties, he had modestly promised her, would ripen to such a degree, if she would permit him to "cut this half," as he called it, that he would graduate the following year with all the honors, to the everlasting glory of the name of Thornton. He quoted many learned authorities against finishing one's university course too young, and assured her of his conviction that his was the kind of brain that matures slowly. This last fact she generously admitted, but remained otherwise unconvinced. Women are not logical, he reflected. It is useless to appeal to them in this purely intellectual manner. They should be influenced through their affections, their kind hearts. Acting upon this idea, he then had dyspepsia in a most aggravated form. He heroically subsisted upon dry toast and tea at home, his young viking frame being sustained by oyster suppers elsewhere. His only books were medical works; his only conversation depressed and hypochondriac in the extreme. He deplored the increasing prevalence of dyspepsia among overworked men of genius, and stated that complete change of air, diversion, and moderate exercise were known to have beneficial effects if the patient were still young, and the disease had not become chronic. He had suffered assiduously about

three weeks; when one day his mother laughed heartily in his face, and told him he was really too insolently brown and ruddy to attempt that *rôle*.

Remembering with satisfaction that he had seen robust-looking men preyed upon by dangerous bronchial troubles, he now took a violent cold. He entertained strong hopes of success by means of his new malady, because his mother had a nervous dread of consumption. He set an alarm-clock to wake him at three, mornings, and, wrapped in his dressing-gown, crawled in a feeble and shattered condition to his mother's room, piteously begging for something to stop his cough. Whether the wicked schemer's heart was touched by her anxiety, or whether the appearance of the family doctor in the little comedy prevented further histrionic successes, the bronchial difficulty, like the dyspepsia, was of brief duration. Mrs. Thornton having desired an examination of her dear boy's chest, "old Fleming and I," Harold related with huge enjoyment of the discreditable episode, "went through the performance with profound gravity; but his very stethoscope was bursting with suppressed laughter."

The bad boy confessed that he had then shaken hands with the medical man, and said, with a pathetic tremor in his voice, —

"Whatever you may have discovered, doctor, I beg that you will not needlessly alarm my mother;" to which the doctor dryly replied, "On the contrary, my dear Thornton, I shall endeavor to reassure her." But the good doctor, it seems, had a

certain weak liking for the young sinner; for, while he dispelled Mrs. Thornton's fears, he did not inform her that her son coughed, "not wisely but too well," from the most superbly vigorous lungs that ever won a boat-race.

The mother had her suspicions now and then, he related; but she evidently reproached herself for doubting him. She was apt to watch him curiously when his cough's hollow reverberation pained her ear. He admitted he still kept it up, although it was a great bore now that his last great scheme had succeeded. "But I don't like to be a rascal on all points," he explained, "so I continue to have occasional coughing paroxysms as a proof of integrity."

Here he sought to accentuate his sublime motive; and Rose, much to her disgust, became a loadstone about which was wreathed a profusion of flowery rhetoric.

Relapsing into his every-day style, "Anybody but you, Rose," he complained, "would be touched by such faithfulness; but I suppose you will only laugh. After all, genius consists in being master of your own situation, not of some other fellow's. Even a Greek hero could not do more than meet the Greek heroic perils in his Greek heroic path. If I had been Jacob, I might have distinguished myself in a georgic atmosphere, serving seven years among wells and fields, flocks and herds. As a mediæval knight, I would have rescued my lady-love from the tyrant's dungeon-keep. My life-conditions, being modern and prosaic, have demanded of me modern

and prosaic action. But you should not on that account undervalue me, Rose; for you alone have been my inspiration. I have surmounted all obstacles, and am coming straight to you."

The main chronicle continued with the proud statement that the strategic feat which had gained the victory was worthy of a Moltke. It was simple, like all that is truly great. Harold had absented himself continually from recitation. He had disregarded admonition and complaint. He conspicuously walked about with two most adventurous sophomores, and was even seen with them the night that they stole a worthy farmer's turkeys. He was proved innocent of the evil deed; yet was reprimanded for conduct unbecoming a senior and a gentleman, and received the rebuke with a stolidity which could proceed only from a hardened and depraved nature. The professors, who knew him well, began to be puzzled. They feared his moral phlegma was a symptom of brain-disease. Several of them tried to influence him, but still he persistently neglected his duties. One evening Professor Ross — "a very good fellow," Harold deigned to call him — came solemnly to his room, and held a long dissertation. He lamented his young friend's downward course, and appealed feelingly to his self-respect, ambition, and honor. Harold listened with heavy indifference as long as possible, then was seized with uncontrollable laughter.

"Why, my honor's all right," he stammered; "but — don't you see? I want to go to Europe."

Professor Ross stared. A light broke over his face. He was young himself. The two sat and looked at each other. "Don't say any more, Thornton. For Heaven's sake don't confide in me, my dear boy," he said solemnly. After a pause, "Are you going to graduate tolerably well next year, Thornton?"

"With a wreath round my neck, the pet lamb of the faculty. This year I am going to Europe," was the dogged answer.

Ross laughed. "I believe you," he said, shook hands cordially with Harold, and went out. The next week he received the reward of his labors. He was suspended for six months.

"Ross is the very best fellow I ever saw," coolly commented the unprincipled youth. "He is as humane as if he were not professor of mathematics and one's natural enemy.

The closing pages seemed to shout and leap for joy. A person more thoroughly satisfied with his imperfect self than Harold Thornton it would be difficult to imagine. How his mother was inconsolable, and how cleverly he reasoned with her; how he reminded her she had said he might travel when he had left college, and had made no conditions as to the manner of leaving; and how she then positively declared it was certainly not her intention to reward his disgraceful conduct by giving him money enough for a European trip, — were all painted in vivid miniature. Then the idea which illumined his being like an electric light, "'I will smite the

rock. I will appeal to aunt Harriet,' was the stupendous thought that saved me."

He rode at full speed to Northbrooke. He told his aunt the unvarnished tale of his misdeeds. He sought to extenuate neither his nefarious consumptive and dyspeptic designs, nor his villanous course at the university. He boldly asked her to lend him the money, and did not blush to name a large amount.

"And what do you think?" he continued rapturously. "The old lady came down with it like a trump. I observed several grim, shadowy smiles during my ingenuous recital, and once a gurgle in her throat suggested a laugh; but she sternly choked it into a cough, and it did not dare make itself heard again. She is a shadow herself, gray as a wraith in the twilight, and hard as flint. But she has done the handsome thing this time. Whether she enjoys outwitting the others, my lady-mother included, whether she has somewhere in her rugged breast a sneaking fondness for me, or whether she has a sympathetic comprehension of my desire to see you, I do not know; possibly all three. But I am sure she is hungering for you. She never once mentioned your name. When I spoke of you, she looked with a cold, fixed gaze out of the window. Of course I found her in the Den. I was so bold as to ask her if she saw your ghost under the elms: to which she made this supremely irrelevant answer, —

"'Serena Lennox is a fool;' and may dear aunt Serena forgive me for repeating this blasphemy.

Aunt Harriet has aged rapidly since you saw her. She stitches more, and grows more taciturn each day. What a ghastly array of dreary thoughts she has stitched into those interminable seams! I was astonished to find myself watching her with a sensation of pity."

Finding he had gained this powerful ally, his mother, he said, had made no further resistance. "'It is useless to oppose fate,' she exclaimed with a kind of classic Greek-chorus piety. 'I propose — Harriet disposes.'" So she kissed and forgave her invincible hero, who hazarded the opinion that she was in reality glad enough to let him go, "only she doesn't think it respectable to be suspended; and, making due allowance for a mother's sensitiveness, I don't suppose it is!"

Then came a specimen of his finest writing, in which Rose in rapid alternation was his oasis, his haven of rest, and his heart's flower. After which the letter concluded solemnly with, —

"Will you have a little welcome for me, Rose? Mine is indeed no boyish fancy, as you have sometimes thought. You must at last concede that it is not. But if you still refuse to believe in me, I will try to be patient. The years that shall make me more of a man shall prove the strength and faithfulness of my devotion, and shall help me win you."

Miss Lennox attentively studied this highly colored and variegated production from beginning to end. Some passages she read twice. Then, folding it

carefully, and laying it upon John's dolorous epistle, she quietly remarked, —

"I call this a most entertaining mail."

"To go to such extremes," began Rose, "to play such jokes on aunt Lucy, to leave college his very last year, and then to declare it is all on my account. I am thoroughly displeased with him. How dares he call me such names!" She stared helplessly at her aunt.

"He is very much attached to you, my dear." Miss Lennox looked amused.

"Of course he is. But I have no patience when he is loverish. Perhaps I have a hard heart, aunt Serena," the girl said with much seriousness; "but I am simply incensed when he writes such rhapsodies about me. It doesn't sound real, and it's ridiculous;" and Rose helped herself to bread and butter.

Miss Lennox smiled.

"After all, it's only Harold," Rose went on. She took up the condemned missive, and re-read parts of it. Her amusement swept away her resentment. She forgot the obnoxious tenderness, and her own heavy responsibility as guiding-star, loadstone, and oasis, haven of rest and heart's flower to this erratic young man, and began to take immense delight in his roguery.

"How he must have enjoyed it!" she exclaimed in great glee, full of comprehension and sympathy for her life-long comrade. "He is always making some sort of excitement. I suppose it is his nature.

He has been very absurd, but I shall be delighted to see him," and she stirred her coffee with a contented air. "I will show that letter to Gertrude. She will appreciate it. Oh," she exclaimed, "how vexatious! I cannot, can I, aunt Serena? I had forgotten the silly part. Do you think I could read it to her and skip the lovering?"

"Perhaps it would be wiser not to try. Letters rarely speak to a stranger with the writer's true voice. They frequently have a rather mischievous ventriloquism in them. We know Harold, and his letter does not deceive us. But it would not represent him fairly to Gertrude."

"No," acquiesced Rose. "She would think him hopelessly deranged, and the dear boy really does have lucid intervals. And then there's aunt Harriet. She is a great tribulation. But then," laughing, "she is our tribulation. She ought not to be revealed to the world."

"She would never criticise you, or even me, out of her own family;" and aunt Serena spoke her indulgent word for the adversary. "She is an unusual woman. She has a strong character. She reminds me of several famous historical figures."

"So she does me," laughed Rose. "But it would be very disrespectful if I should mention which ones. Of course it does not occur to me to speak freely of either aunt Harriet or Harold, except to Gertrude. But I confess I am inclined to chatter in the freest way to her. There is something very sweet in Gertrude's way of listening. She gives one that long,

grave look, then suddenly smiles all over her face. Did you not notice her pretty manner with Mr. Bruce? I know he liked her;" and the young girl smiled with generous delight.

"I think they both did. Gertrude is very attractive. She has a fine simplicity. She may come to-day to talk with me, I think. Perhaps that is she, dear," Miss Lennox added as she heard a knock. Rose sprang up eagerly, with outstretched hands, and met Mrs. Vivien.

"Good-morning, dear Miss Wellesley. You're looking sunny as the sunshine this beautiful day," said the little lady sweetly. "Good-morning, dear Miss Lennox. You did not expect so early a visit, now, did you? But I do like to flit freely in and out of my friends' homes and hearts. You'll very soon see through poor little me, I fear. I'm not very profound, do you know? I'm only a harmless little thing, — not deep, like clever Miss Peyton." And she threw up her eyes as if language could not portray the depths of Miss Peyton's dark and inscrutable nature. "I'm content to be simply affectionate. Mr. Vivien says deep women are dangerous women. Give him an affectionate woman. But I suppose you'll think that is only a fond husband's weakness." And she laughed a little, pleased, conscious laugh.

"It is not very early, Mrs. Vivien," aunt Serena answered with her courteous intonation that made even an unwelcome guest feel well cared for. "Rosamond and I are indolent." A slightly puzzled

look appeared in her brown eyes, a very brilliant flash in Rosamond's; and the girl slipped noiselessly out of the room.

Mrs. Vivien had, as she spoke, drawn a low chair near Miss Lennox, and seated herself with a gently familiar air. The little woman was as tender and youthful as a pale rose-colored cashmere morning toilet could make her.

"I have come to sit a while with you," she said. "I have brought my work." And she produced some knitting-needles and a half-finished coarse gray stocking. It properly belonged to her supply of ammunition for men. At a critical moment this unæsthetic object had often wielded a potent charm. "She must be sincere if she knits stockings for the poor," concluded the victim who had survived the beguiling smiles and winning voice, and half suspected the treachery of the dark eyes, to be slain at last by the fatal sophistry of the stocking. This one was now eight years old. She had never yet completed one, but occasionally, when travelling, had left one by accident in a hotel, and then was obliged to prepare another. She was never without one. She rarely resorted to her knitting in the presence of women; they had a way of smiling disagreeably: but this Miss Lennox, she reasoned, was not like other women, and might be as trusting as a great, stupid, dear man. In this Mrs. Vivien erred.

"You are industrious," remarked aunt Serena.

"It is for the poor," said her guest, looking up

artlessly. "I used to embroider constantly when I was a girl. But Mr. Vivien likes this homely virtue, and then I really prefer to feel of a little use in this great busy world. There is not much I can do," she added with cheerful resignation, "because of my poor chest."

Aunt Serena heard her mention Mr. Vivien and her chest with some surprise. They were, with the stocking, Mrs. Vivien's best weapons. But aunt Serena was, after all, a woman; and they could not be expected to have their full effect upon her. "She is not as trusting as a man," quickly decided the astute knitter, and began to speak of other matters.

"There is something I do so want to say to you, Miss Lennox," she began timidly.

"I am quite at your service, Mrs. Vivien."

"But you must not misunderstand. It hurts me to be misunderstood." She laid down her knitting, and clasped her hands.

"I will try not to misunderstand," said aunt Serena gravely.

"It is about Miss Peyton."

"Of course you know that I like and respect Miss Peyton." And aunt Serena looked steadily at her visitor.

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Vivien fervently, "I know that well, and am so glad for her! I wanted to confess to you that I have been instrumental in gaining a little pleasure for her, and it may be an influential friend."

"You, Mrs. Vivien?" said aunt Serena thoughtfully.

"Yes, I, the giddy little butterfly." And Mrs. Vivien laughed pleasantly. "I know you think me giddy, and no wonder: I am so impulsive. But, indeed, I haven't a bad heart. It was really nothing to do," she added modestly; "for I had the opportunity, and Mrs. Raymond and I are most intimate. I merely spoke of Miss Peyton to her in such a way yesterday, that she began to take quite an interest in the young girl."

In the calm depths of aunt Serena's most charitable soul had reposed a passive disapproval of Mrs. Vivien. But the kind old lady's opinion of so much flippant malice, affectation, and other obnoxious qualities, had never sought expression, or, indeed, crystallized itself within her consciousness. Now she was filled with generous self-reproach. "I have been unjust," she thought, her past indistinct, floating impressions assuming weight and stability in contrast to so much positive goodness as she now recognized in her guest.

"That was kind," she hastened to say with tender emphasis and a gracious warmth she had not before bestowed upon Mrs. Vivien. "Allow me to say that I am personally grateful to you, since I have a special regard for Miss Peyton. I noticed yesterday that Mrs. Raymond was pointedly cordial to her. I take great pleasure" — and aunt Serena spoke with gentle formality, her conscience demanding an explicit recognition of the virtuous deed — "in

thanking you for it." She was smiling with her fine, honest lips, and with her eyes, that seemed to grow larger and browner with their clear look of approval; and she extended her hand, — the fair, frail hand of an aged gentlewoman.

Mrs. Vivien took it; and, what is more, she took it without compunction. Had she been the villain in a model story, she would have been touched, either by aunt Serena's generous confidence, or by her gray hair. But Mrs. Vivien was not that kind of a villain. She merely obeyed the instincts of her nature, in which was reverence for nothing whatever, and with a pretty, deprecating air, replied, —

"Indeed, it was nothing. I did not say very much, I assure you. Mrs. Raymond only needed to have her attention turned properly in the right direction. She is a woman of the world, you know, and" —

"But not a worldly woman, I think," was Miss Lennox's mild interruption.

"Oh, by no means!" returned the pretty little knitter. "I was merely going to say she had heard these unfortunate stories about Miss Peyton; and, while holding herself neutral enough, she would naturally not go out of her way to refute them, unless solicited."

"Of course not," aunt Serena admitted cheerily. "That I understand, and so it was kind of you to speak a friendly word for Gertrude. Not that I consider Miss Peyton a person who is in want of much support. She is a strong, self-reliant char-

acter, and could take care of all of us. But she is very young, and a hard worker, and needs enlivening influences. A little society would be an excellent thing for her; and Mrs. Raymond is a charming woman, capable of appreciating Miss Peyton, whom I consider a very remarkable girl for her age."

Mrs. Vivien dropped a stitch. She often dropped stitches in her best work, just as it was approaching completion.

It was a weakness in this adroit tactician that she was apt to be confused when she heard the enemy praised. A cloud of jealous resentment would suddenly obscure her faculties, and lead her from the path which she had chosen in the clear, hard light of her brilliant malice. She had come this morning with well-digested schemes, and desired to lead up slowly, feeling her ground, to a position which she hoped would command the whole field. Now she made her approach with indiscreet haste.

"What I have done has been with the best intentions; and Mrs. Raymond, a married woman, in her secure position is, of course, invulnerable; so my conscience is at rest on that point: but I am, I confess, a little uneasy on Miss Wellesley's account."

Aunt Serena looked intently at her. The bright needles in the little lady's white hands flashed above the rosy gown. Her eyelids were meekly cast down. The ball of gray yarn had rolled far off on the polished floor.

"I trust that it is not any doubt of the security

of Miss Wellesley's position that causes your uneasiness," remarked aunt Serena slowly with gentle stateliness. It was her habit to speak of Rose as "my niece Rosamond," often simply as "Rosamond." Her "Miss Wellesley" was eloquent.

"You misunderstand, Miss Lennox." In the tone was a saintly patience.

"I am sure I must have misunderstood. I beg your pardon;" and aunt Serena's kind smile sought to rectify the error.

There was a brief pause.

"It is strange," reflected the busy brain behind the meek white eyelids, "that one goes thus far and no farther with this dull old woman."

"Miss Lennox, you misunderstand, because I am actuated solely by a desire to protect Miss Wellesley from what can hardly be a desirable influence. You see for yourself. I feel most kindly towards Miss Peyton. I have done for her what lay in my power. But that does not imply that I approve of all that she does, or that I should be silent when I feel that I ought to speak, does it?"

Aunt Serena thought of Gertrude's simple, straightforward manner and brave young eyes, and listened quietly.

Mrs. Vivien was encouraged by her silence.

"You once used an apt and beautiful expression, dear Miss Lennox, which has lingered in my memory. 'Any thing that could really stain the white soul within her,' you said the day we had that most instructive conversation."

Aunt Serena bowed gravely.

"Now, do you think it would stain the white soul within a girl," and Mrs. Vivien's voice sank to its most caressing cadence, "to have a rendezvous with a man, after midnight, on a stairway in utter darkness? and if I can solemnly affirm this to be true of Miss Peyton, ought I to conceal it from you, and allow, even tacitly approve of, her intimacy with your niece?"

In all the sweet years of aunt Serena's life she had never before looked a woman in the face and doubted her word.

"Mrs. Vivien," she began slowly, with an inscrutable look on her fine old face, —

In the corridor sang a clear voice, —

> "God's in his heaven —
> All's right with the world!"

"Pippa passes at the right moment," thought aunt Serena.

"Mrs. Vivien," she began again, — both ladies had risen, — "I am at a loss" —

("May Sindbad the Sailor come in?" asked Gertrude at the door. The girl took one step forward, and stood motionless.)

— "to understand," continued Miss Lennox, walking toward Gertrude, and kissing her on both cheeks, "why you should care to take so much trouble."

Mrs. Vivien stooped, picked up her ball of gray yarn, and went out.

CHAPTER XII.

"And he set at all the brazen doors
A doubled guard.
Yet who shall shut out Fate?"
EDWIN ARNOLD.

"Great gifts can be given by little hands,
Since of all gifts love is still the best."
ADELAIDE PROCTER.

DEER - UNKEL - CID
I - AM - GOOD - AND - QUYIT -. PLEAS - TAK - THE - KARS - AND - TAK - THE - BOTE - AND - KUM - OVER - AND - PLAY - WITH - ME - THIS - IS - MAMMAS - PRITTY - GOLD - PEN.
FROM - YOUR - AFFEKSHUNITE - NEES
EDITH - BRUCE - RAYMOND -

DEER - UNKEL - CID - AN - THAY - WER - HAAPPY - A YEER - AN - A - DAY.
KUM - OVER - AN - I - WIL - TEL - YOU - ABOUT - IT
FROM - YORE - AFEKSHUNIT - NEES -
MARJORIE - BRUCE - RAYMOND -

These imperfect but candid and characteristic effusions were strong links in the chain of events which had led Sydney Bruce to Wynburg. There were, in fact, two chains. Or was it one long,

solemn one, beginning with the beginning of all things? Not to strain our myopic vision by peering into dim vistas of the past, let us content ourselves with a glance at the two distinct short chains, one of which began in Wynburg in the pleasant month of June. Did it begin with Mrs. Raymond's faithful Elise? Or with the summer journey? Or did Edith's superfluous energy create the point of departure? Or was it the gold pen? Or little Marjorie's sweet spirit, lost in fairy lore, and sending its dazed, loving greeting from the enchanted land of its wanderings?

These are the facts. The day before the Raymond family was to start for Ostende, Elise had a blinding headache. Now, Elise was a superior person, who had never before been known to allow a paltry physical limitation to restrict the admirable execution of her duties; and she always packed her mistress's trunks with a system approaching perfection. It was perfection, the family thought: but with a touch of the unconscious superstition which prevails among rude, and is rarely quite absent from fine, folk, Mrs. Raymond never dared say how perfectly perfect her Elise was, dreading the jealous wrath of the immortals; or, in more rational and less pagan language, as the lady herself would have expressed it, for fear that something would happen. Years of Elise had rendered Mrs. Raymond more helpless than she otherwise would have been before yawning leather caverns, mountain-ranges of linen, unexplored tracts of little boots and toys, and rich

acres of French toilettes. Elise herself was in despair. She could not be induced to retire from the scene of action, but clung to a sofa in her mistress's dressing-room, and, with tears of shame and contrition, confessed to the upper housemaid, upon whom her duties had fallen, that she could scarcely distinguish the difference between Mr. Raymond's shirts and baby Percy's socks, that the sight of all the many-colored stockings was enough to craze her, — and really the children seemed to have more legs than usual to-day, — and as to folding a ribbon, she was as helpless as a fly, she sobbed. But she nobly remained at her post; and a word, feeble in utterance, yet mighty with genius, would often at a critical moment avert a catastrophe in the gigantic complications of the work of distribution.

Mrs. Raymond was sorry for her maid and sorry for herself. She was also somewhat appalled at the situation, but she had the praiseworthy habit of never losing her equanimity.

"Bring every thing in, Anna," she said, "and begin with the children's ordinary clothes for the beach. I will come directly, as soon as I have finished this letter."

In the mean time, Edith and Marjorie, who usually delighted to "help pack," were banished, that they might not intensify the chaotic element which they loved, or increase Elise's misery. Dreamy Marjorie sat on the floor, and read "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood." Life had at this moment nothing more to offer her. But Edith was of a

different temperament. It cost her an effort to be still while mamma wrote. Her toys were up stairs where she must not go. She could not read the same thing a hundred times like Marjorie, she thought with some impatience. She threw down her book, and looked out of the window. It was a quiet street, and nobody was passing. She watched her pretty mamma, and the rings flashing on the white hand flying over the paper. She came slowly to the table and stood still.

"Mamma, when may I have a gold pen?"

"I will give you one as soon as you learn to write," said Mrs. Raymond, smiling.

"Will it go as fast as yours?"

"Yes, dear, sometime. When you know how to use it."

A pause. Then, —

"Mamma, when may I have a monogram?"

"Edith, dear, don't talk to mamma now. Take your book, like Marjorie."

The little girl obeyed. Presently she came stealing up to her mother.

"Mamma, I don't like it, you know, because it isn't true. If Snow White lay there so long with the little dwarfs watching, she must have been hungry; and a little, wee, tiny bit of a small piece of apple couldn't have made her all dead and then all alive again. Besides, I know it beforehand, because I read it when I was little, — no bigger than Marjorie."

"O Edith!" cried a reproachful voice from the

floor, "it could have killed her, — in fairy-land; and its true, — in fairy-land."

"Marjorie," said Edith with dignity, "you are a very little girl." Marjorie happened to be sixteen months younger than her sister. "Mamma, are you telling uncle Cid that I am going to make sand-pies all day long at Ostende?"

"I will try to remember it, dear."

"Mamma, will uncle Cid come soon?"

"Yes, dear, if you are very good and quiet until mamma finishes her letter," answered Mrs. Raymond somewhat absently, and with the peculiar logic which busy mothers are apt to instil into the brains of loquacious children.

At this moment she was given to understand that her presence up stairs would be a priceless boon, and quickly left the room.

Edith promptly took her mamma's chair, and grasped her mamma's pen, to which Mrs. Raymond's attachment resembled idolatry. "Burn my India shawl, drop indelible ink on my finest lace, shatter my best china, and sit on my last Paris hat, if you will," she had once remarked to her husband, "but, Henry, — an' you love me, — never touch my pen!"

"How nice every thing is up here," thought Edith, complacently dangling her short legs. "Marjorie," she called blithely, "see me write a grown-up letter." And, beginning where Mrs. Raymond's elegant handwriting had ended in the middle of a felicitous expression, the child pursed up her mouth,

and proudly formed her hieroglyphics. The Raymond children's education, not as yet forced, had made them quite competent to print their original phonetic spelling equally well in English, French, and German.

After a while she said, with an important air, "Marjorie, I have invited uncle Cid to make us a visit. I think it would be polite if you should put down that silly fairy-book, and write him a letter too. You needn't write much, because you are little. And then, you might hurt mamma's pretty gold pen."

The adored pen had already its right point well tipped up. It was now about to undergo a similar deforming process on its left one.

Thus grandly invoked, Marjorie, nothing loath, also climbs to the seat of honor. She loved her uncle Cid, and was his special pet among his sister's children. According to her baby inspiration, she, too, wrote.

Edith looked critically at the result.

"It is very crooked," commented the lofty older sister, "and it is not sense; and they spell affectionate with two f's, as I did, Marjorie. But never mind, uncle Cid will excuse it."

Mrs. Raymond returned several hours later, to hurriedly close her letter with, —

"More next week, from Ostende, dear Sydney. The children have, as you see, spoiled my sheet, and, as I see, nearly annihilated my precious pen: but I have no time to re-write any thing; so take,

with dearest love from all, the combined efforts of the family."

When the letter reached uncle Cid, however, he neither regarded it as spoiled, nor did he find Marjorie's missive open in the faintest degree to criticism. It seemed to him, then, a delectable epistle. And all his after-life he blessed the chubby, dimpled hand that had reached out from fairy-land to draw him in.

The chain of circumstances on his side of the Atlantic was also formed of apparently trivial incidents. If Sydney Bruce's friend Carroll's yacht, "West Wind," had not needed to lie by for repairs of her machinery, Bruce would have been off on a six weeks' cruise at the time of the arrival of the Wynburg letter; and, in the jocund mood caused by the sea and good company, it is possible that even Marjorie would not have touched his heart. But the "West Wind" broke her shaft, and Mr. Carroll was obliged to implore his friends to have patience. While indefinitely waiting, Bruce went up to Maine to see an old friend, and settle some business affairs of long standing. Returning to the city, it seemed hot and dull. He had caught glimpses, as one sometimes does on what one begins as an arid and a prosaic journey, of much that seemed to him cool and fresh and beautiful in remembrance. He was a city man, and liked city life. "I hate the city," he began inconsequently to say to himself. "I wish I were a wild creature of the woods. From May till November the city is

an abomination." The fatal "West Wind" still delayed. Bruce went down to his office mornings, and mechanically attended to a little business. "Why did I, being a sane man, ever choose the law?" he thought. "Why am I not a sheep-farmer, a hunter, a trapper-guide?"

One day his senior partner, a jovial gentleman, who had also been Sydney's father's senior partner, and was still hale and robust as the patriarchs of old, stared, not unkindly, at the young man, and said, —

"Bruce, why are you not off somewhere?"

"I know no place where I really wish to be," Sydney answered.

"I thought you were going yachting."

"The 'West Wind' has broken her shaft."

"Try some other boat."

"I prefer Carroll's party."

"Please yourself, my dear boy, but don't forget that you are still a young man, though the most *posé* man of your age I know," he went on quizzically. "Have you no longings? Don't you want to run down to the beach, and have a flirtation or two?"

"No," replied Sydney, with a positiveness that made the older gentleman smile.

"It is true, your experience has been comprehensive, and it may be sufficient," continued Mr. Lawrence, looking at him with a reflective air. "Bruce, you don't mind any thing I say, of course. I speak as your father might have spoken. Why don't you marry?"

Bruce smiled. If I answer you as I should most men, I should say, because I do not choose. If without reserve, because I am not in love."

"That's a pretty way to tell an old friend it's none of his business," chuckled the old gentleman.

"As to that, Lawrence, it's your business fairly enough, provided you care to interest yourself in so vague and unimportant a topic," Bruce rejoined indifferently.

Late that night he sat alone in his own house. It was incredibly dreary. Even the servants as they moved about seemed oppressed with preternatural gloom.

"It is the city in July that gives everybody the blues," he reflected. "I might have staid a few days in Northbrooke. It was green and cool and shady up there. Stretched at full length on his back in the woods, a man forgets to ask, Is life worth living? And if he is such a fool as to ask, Nature's answer is conclusive. Yet the lovely little girl cried. Sorrow pursued her, even in that Arcadia. I wonder now what was the matter with her. If I knew the A and the Z of the little maid's distress, I should find it dull enough, no doubt. But as something isolated, fragmentary, enigmatical, she has roused speculation in my languid and selfish soul; and I have thought of her at least three times in one week, which honor, small as it is, is one which no other woman can claim at present. To be sure, there was novelty in the incident. I never before happened to see a girl with both arms

round a horse's neck;" and he smiled, as if the recollection was not upon the whole displeasing.

"Lawrence is right. I am old, — older than a man has any right to be," he thought with a certain fierce disgust, and glared cynically at the pursuing eyes of a portrait on the wall. It was he himself, — ten years old, in a sailor suit and a crimson necktie with gayly floating ends; a little lad with steadfast eyes, bold and brave in mien, the small, haughty head thrown back. "Man," asked the grave eyes of the child, "what hast thou done with the years? They are mine as thine." And Sydney's spirit humbly made response, "Little good; little good, if little evil."

By his own small self was his sister Florence, dainty and smiling, all in happy blue, a loose, long garland of honeysuckle in her soft hands, one end trailing on the ground. He smiled. The picture had proved prophetic. "Little Florence! She has always had her garlands, and known how to wear them; and at her life-banquet is the exquisite honey of Hymettus." He remembered his father's pride in the portraits, and how he had them hung in the library where they would be near him. "That is right, Syd," he had said heartily. "That is the way a brave lad looks, — straight in the great world's face. While you are on guard, little Folly here may play with her posies in security." Folly had had her posies, and he had been on guard; but he had scarcely done much else. At least, so it seemed

to him this evening. As he had said, it was the city in July.

A servant brought in the late mail. The letters lay several minutes on the table beside him unheeded. He was in that mood when a man would neglect a sacred duty for the engrossing pleasure of analyzing and condemning himself. Yet what we call the "destinies" of many souls lay in that patient little white heap; and it was so instinct with the ardent life-spirit of its writers, it was a wonder that it retained its position, one envelope soberly placed upon the other, the largest — from Wynburg — underneath, instead of resolving into its elements, and flying madly about his handsome, indifferent head.

Every man has one curious, inveterate habit. Sydney Bruce's was to read letters exactly as they came, without studying superscriptions, seeking the sweet, or shunning the bitter.

He opened the first letter. It was a jocose scrawl from Carroll, reporting progress on the "West Wind." That gentleman was obviously determined to keep his friends within reach, and himself in remembrance, that the feast of the gods might still be celebrated. "Fickle, coy 'West Wind,' to keep so many eager souls in suspense," thought Sydney, and read his next letter, which was a cordial invitation to Newport. "You shall be free as air," wrote the lady — an old family friend — from her cottage. "Jack says he will not even presume to suggest that you smoke a cigar with him. Only

come, and make us all happy." — "She is kind, and she means it; but, nevertheless, I should not be free. I am too selfish to go." He glanced at the next epistle coldly. It was also an invitation, this time to Long Branch, from a fashionable woman who liked to fill her house with agreeable guests. The fatuity with which vulgar people, who wish to appear intimate with one, rush upon ground where angels and familiar friends fear to tread, caused her to put in her list of attractions, "Eleanor Vaughn is here, as beautiful as ever." Whatever further revelations the letter contained he spared himself by dropping it unread into his waste-basket. Then came two stout envelopes full of unmitigated business. He read them with a sense of relief. The sixth he took up carelessly, then gazed at it as if it were the head of Medusa instead of an elegant, jasmine-scented missive, artistic as to its monogram and subtle as to its suggestions.

"This was needed to-night," he muttered grimly. It was a torrid letter; but he turned the closely written pages with impenetrable coldness, and read only the last line, —

"Be pitiful, Sydney, be pitiful, and let me explain."

"Let you explain! Ye gods! She wishes to explain!" and he laughed aloud in the silent house, until Bates hurried in with a startled face.

"Did you wish any thing, sir?"

"Nothing, Bates. Nothing whatever. I was merely laughing at a most excellent joke."

"Yes, sir," said Bates stolidly, and withdrew.

Sydney devoted a few moments to the somewhat sardonic consideration of the infinite faith a faithless woman expects to find in the heart of a man.

He opened his sister's epistle with kindly interest. Mrs. Raymond wrote a delightful letter, healthy, clear, never self-conscious, never too long, dainty in garb, and vivacious in expression. She told her brother their plans for the summer, and as usual affectionately begged him to join them, without, however, the least expectation that he would come. Nor had he as he read. Then the children's masterpieces met his eye. He received Edith's invitation with an indulgent smile. "She is like her mamma. She knows about trains and steamships." But when he saw poor little Marjorie's greeting, his face grew strangely moved and tender. "Blessed infant! I can see her coming from her fairy tangles, — rubbing her sweet eyes as if but half awake, — to do this righteous deed for me, — a sinner." And the queer, awkward scrawl that said so little and so much, seemed as harmonious to him as any other beautiful song without words, and as loving as the touch of Marjorie's shy, rose-leaf palm on his brow.

"And was ever anybody happy a year and a day? And will you tell me about it, sweetheart? And you spell it *haappy*, with two a's, you dear, delicious mite. That must be a broad, strong current of happiness where you sail. I will come over, Marjorie, and sit at your feet. I am as old as the hills,

wise little Marjorie. You shall lead me to the fountain of youth."

Then he wrote a kind letter to his friend at Newport, saying he was about to join Mrs. Raymond at Ostende, sent a cool, civil regret to Long Branch, and pacified Carroll as best he could. The next morning he said to Mr. Lawrence, —

"I'm going to take your advice. I'm going away."

"Excellent. You are going to run down to the beach?"

"To a beach; yes. To Ostende."

"Ah! Well, why not? But stay over there, Bruce. Don't come flying home by the return steamer. We'll cable if we want you. Perhaps George and I will be granted wisdom enough to conduct the office a month or two," said the old gentleman modestly. "What do you say, George?"

"Lawyers threatened with softening of the brain all flee to Europe," remarked Mr. George Lawrence. "Any danger for Sydney?"

"No one will suspect it," replied the old gentleman. "He has never worked hard enough."

Sydney smiled. "There was no necessity. Your laurels and my father's have fallen on my undeserving brow."

"'Hm! You'd better go to Europe with your undeserving brow," returned Lawrence dryly. "And take time over there to grow young. We want youths in this office. We have octogenarians enough. Do you hear?"

And Bruce went to Europe. Unconscious Marjorie's charm won him when the others had failed. His indifference and depression, his remorseful memory of past weakness, his weary disgust at a warmth which found no response in his own breast, his stern contempt for the lies of a beautiful woman whose very beauty had grown loathsome to him, — all, at the sweet, pure call of a child's voice from the depths of her fairy glades, fled like a troop of frightened demons before the uplifted cross; and Sydney Bruce, light of heart, he knew not why, sailed towards Ostende and — he knew not what.

He had merely telegraphed his sister, and taken the first steamer. Arriving, as soon as the outbursts of delight were somewhat appeased, he announced his intention to belong exclusively to the children. With riotous joy they took him at his word, and triumphantly carried him off to their favorite haunts, and an unlimited course of sand-pies and quiet fairy-corners. Mrs. Raymond was too glad to have him upon any terms to make objections to this monopoly. "There's nobody here I want for him," she confided to her husband after a few days.

"There are several who want him, however," answered Mr. Raymond.

"There always are," the admiring sister said carelessly.

"I have often wondered in what Sydney's special attraction to women lies," he said speculatively.

"He's a good-looking fellow, but he has slain his tens of thousands where another man" —

"You, for instance," suggested his wife, smiling.

"Yes, I — if you like — have slain only my thousands."

"Henry," she explained, "you and Sydney are the same height and the same size, and your clothes look alike, and your voices are not dissimilar, and you both have Antinous noses, and, curiously enough, what I call indistinct hair, — brown fading into early gray; but you are no more alike, and you look no more alike, than — than" —

"Than a nutmeg and a calla-lily," said her husband, coming to her aid. "Thanks for the catalogue of my charms, my dear."

"You have a great many charms for me," remarked Mrs. Raymond in her sincere, direct way. "You suit me better than a man like Sydney would. I mean, — as my husband."

Mr. Raymond laughed. "You suit me better than any other woman in the world would. I mean, — as my wife."

"I do not doubt it," she said seriously. "Fortunately, we suit each other. But Sydney would be more attractive to many women than you could ever be, for the simple reason, that while he has lived as well as you, and been, upon the whole, quite as comfortable, I think, he has not the air of it. You are simple."

"Indeed!"

"He is complex. You are sunny: he is some-

times, but not always. He is indifferent to women. You were never in your life perfectly indifferent to a pretty girl, Henry," she said with smiling emphasis.

"My dear Florence!" he expostulated.

"He takes life seriously," she continued. "You take it as a pastime. You look out of your gray eyes as if everybody were a joke. He looks out of his thoughtfully; and all the women think he has suffered, that he has a history. And most women, whether they like it in a husband or not, are bewitched with a suffering soul in a lover."

"But what in the deuce" —

"Hush!" Mrs. Raymond went on. "It is not his fault. You know yourself that no man is more incapable of 'posing' than Sydney. You asked me for the difference between you, and I'm telling you. That is all. He doesn't aspire to the suffering-soul ideal; and for that matter, I really don't think Sydney has ever suffered any thing to speak of," she said coolly. "Since that unpleasant experience with Eleanor Vaughn years ago, things have run along as smoothly for him as for us. But you see, he has aspirations, and we have none."

"What a clever woman you are, Florence," said her husband, laughing. "Pray continue your admirable exposition."

"He longs to elevate humanity, or at least he longs to have it elevated. Now, we don't, Henry."

"No, my love, I don't think we do."

"As long as we find things comfortable and people agreeable, we are satisfied."

"We are," repeated Mr. Raymond heartily.

"And except that Percy's teeth make me a little anxious, I have not at this moment a care in the world. But Sydney has. He is lofty, and we are commonplace and matter-of-fact. I have been matter-of-fact all my life," she stated, smiling brightly at her husband; "and so have you, Henry. Now, watch Sydney. He cannot help it; but he's actually brooding over the life-problem of that little girl, the child of one of the bathers, who follows our children about. I call her a pretty, bright-eyed child. He calls the little brown thing a pure pearl. He talks about the dusky warmth of her eyes and the opal glow of her cheek. I think I even heard him say that she has a lotus-face. Now, Henry, do you know why that child has a lotus-face? For I do not hesitate to say I have not the faintest idea."

Mr. Raymond laughed with exceeding delight.

"He says poetry to Marjorie, and watches the effect of it on the fisherman's daughter."

"That's what is usually called flirting," suggested Raymond.

"Oh, no: he is merely analyzing her emotions."

"Same thing, is it not?"

"And I actually believe he is pondering upon the propriety of having her educated."

"And marrying her? That would not be an unheard-of thing. Think of the Capri beauties who have married in the great world."

"He hasn't gone so far as to consider that yet," Mrs. Raymond replied tranquilly. "He is disinterested. Fortunately the child is matter-of-fact too. He can't make her melt as Marjorie does with his stories. He will become tired of her if he discovers her to be 'soulless.'"

"How old is she?"

"Thirteen possibly. But you see, Henry, you and I can look at the nut-brown maid with no desire to ameliorate her condition. Sydney cannot. He always sees possibilities."

"Or impossibilities. He would do better to marry," said Mr. Raymond.

His wife nodded unqualified assent.

"And I am glad you are matter-of-fact, if that is what you call it. I think you are about right, Florence, just as you are," he said kindly.

"Henry, dear, you and I are very comfortable, but we have not Sydney's charm," she answered sedately.

Meanwhile, Sydney, unconscious of the friendly councils held in his behalf, equally unmindful of the serried ranks of matrons with marriageable daughters, invulnerable to the charge of the light brigade of professional beauties, and blind to the dangerous ambush of the *ingénues*, swam, walked, and fished like a careless boy in the holidays, and, above all, was the children's devoted cavalier. Marjorie's people who were "happy a year and a day," and even they who were "happy forever after," hovered about his path with their gracious influences. Each

day his eye grew brighter, his step more elastic; and had one ventured to suggest to him that he had a "suffering soul," he would have greeted the remark with an explosion of laughter, so ignorant was he of the fine things attributed to him.

"For what is Mr. Bruce 'posing'?" inquired an irate belle satirically, after ten days' unsuccessful angling for his attention.

Her brother, weary of kneeling every evening in the hotel or crowded casino, with a struggling throng of aspirants, before a dull heiress, — rich as the mines of Golconda, stolidly ugly as a Chinese idol, — growled, —

"He's posing for comfort, and he succeeds uncommonly well."

After Ostende, the Raymonds spent some pleasant weeks in Switzerland and Baden-Baden, returning to Wynburg in October; and Mrs. Raymond was in a prolonged state of wonder and delight that her brother had not yet proposed going to America.

"If I can keep him here this winter," she said to her husband, "I shall be almost too happy."

"There's hope for Sydney," Mr. Raymond replied. "He seems inclined to take a cheerful view of most things. Indeed," with an amused look at his wife, "I almost think now and then that he is matter-of-fact."

CHAPTER XIV.

"Does the road wind up-hill all the way?"
CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

"WHY Mrs. Vivien was here, and what has happened, are matters which do not concern me," reasoned Gertrude Peyton.

"Why Mrs. Vivien was here, and what has happened, are matters which require no explanation," reasoned aunt Serena.

Rosamond, instinctively opposed to abusing a guest the moment her foot had crossed the threshold, came in with a virtuous air of self-control, but lost it speedily in delight, when Bäbele appeared, her rubicund visage half concealed by a long, low, oval basket of roses, which she bore proudly aloft. Uttering rapturous ejaculations, she laid it on Miss Lennox's knee.

"Flowers for me?" and aunt Serena looked wonderingly at the two young girls. "Have you done this, children?"

Their quick eyes spied a card. "For Miss Lennox. Compliments of Mr. Sydney Bruce," Rosamond read, with pleased emphasis. Aunt Serena hung over the roses in mute ecstasy, her hands clasped above them, her eyes devouring them as they lay there in their loveliness among their own

cool leaves, — fragrant, dewy, cut with long, generous stems, and sent in beautiful confusion, with no attempt at arrangement. Dusky Dutch Velvets, full blown, and heavy with their own sweetness; pale, slender, white buds, looking cold and coy; rich, warm Jacqueminots; Maréchal Niels; pink tea-roses, and the perfect ones, where the creamy tint is suffused with a faint blush, as if a tender thought were passing over it.

Aunt Serena looked up at the eager girls standing before her. In her soft dark eyes was a suspicion of tears.

"Children," she said slowly, "Mr. Bruce has made me very happy. I am a foolish old woman to be so pleased. But no one has sent me a basket of flowers in forty-three years; and it touches me, my dears, — it touches me deeply." She gave a little tremulous apologetic smile, and looked down into the glowing hearts of her flowers.

With quick grace Rose stooped, and lightly kissed the silvery hair on the bowed head.

"And you call yourself old!" she exclaimed. "Why, you couldn't possibly be any younger, you dear person, not unless you were an infant."

"Forty-three years," repeated aunt Serena in a low tone, half to herself; "forty-three years ago this very month:" and she looked again from the roses to the girls, with the sweet surprise and the old memories in her face.

Gertrude wanted to cry. There seemed to be no reason why she should. Aunt Serena looked happy

if moved; and Rosamond had assumed a spirited and protective air towards her, as she was wont to do when their respective positions were for a moment reversed, and it was her aunt who needed her aid. But Gertrude often felt a certain weak, choking sensation in her strong, song-bird throat when she was with these two. At aunt Serena's feet she offered homage and adoration, as to a holy saint in a shrine; and more, — she gave an intense personal devotion, as if that enshrined saint had reached out to her, in her loneliness, loving, pitiful, human hands, — had breathed sweet words of guidance and of hope into her desolate soul. And Rose was the personification of the light, warmth, and sweetness in which her own dreary life had failed. But the very security and sympathy existing between the two companions, the perfect relationship which they enjoyed, it seemed to her as naturally as they breathed, filled her with sadness. "It is so rare," she thought; "and they do not even know how wonderful and beautiful it is. Why, I would give all the rest of my life if I might be as happy as this dear Rose one single day!" Yet no shade of envy darkened her generous spirit. It was only that the loveliness she now perceived was so vivid a contrast to her own experience, that, in watching her new friends, she was always living in two worlds.

Aunt Serena, in spite of the staid gentleness of her manner, was noticeably unlike the people about her. Her direct, loyal, simple words and ways made her to Gertrude as much of a marvel as Rose

herself, with her pretty, fearless caprices, and her habitual unconsciousness that she was living in a world regarded by most people as a sorry place at best. "I must tell them every thing, every thing," thought Gertrude; "and she will know what I ought to do. She will know, like the angel sent to guide the young Tobias, — in the picture." But now she felt like crying, nevertheless; and it seemed to be only because Miss Serena Lennox was pleased with her beautiful roses. Aunt Serena looked at the young girl, and suddenly forgot her flowers and her old associations.

"Why, Gertrude, child!" she said in her low voice. Gertrude was quite still, and her eyes were dry and bright; but aunt Serena had a divining-rod for pain in the depths of human hearts.

"Rose, you may put them in water in my room, and begin to arrange them," and she held out the basket. She knew, that while Gertrude, in all probability, had nothing to say which she would wish withheld from Rose, yet it would be easier for her to speak if her young friend were not seated formally as second auditor; a confidence "under six eyes" being rarely satisfactory. "Wait, dear;" and choosing two deep, red buds, she gave one to Gertrude. "You should always wear that rich color," she said, as Gertrude fastened it at her throat. While she spoke, she studied the young, earnest face. "The child would rather I would begin," she concluded.

"You said you wished to tell me something, my

dear, I believe, some little trouble — some doubt — perplexity. If you will trust me so far, I would gladly be of service to you; and I think you may trust me, Gertrude," she added in her quiet voice.

Gertrude smiled. "I trust you as I would trust one of God's high archangels," she thought; but what she said was only, —

"I wish to tell you my whole life."

Miss Lennox made an involuntary restraining gesture.

"My child," she said, "what you have in your heart to tell me, you may tell as freely as if you were Rosamond. But for your own sake be sure that you will not regret it. Sometimes one speaks, and afterwards one is sorry. I would not wish you to be sorry that you had told me your life, my dear; and you do not need to tell me a word. In years, it is still a little life. I am sure it has been good and brave. You shall tell it all if you wish, if it would be a relief to you; but you do not need to speak. Rose and I are not curious."

"No, we are not," corroborated Rose emphatically, coming in with a filled vase, going out with an empty one, and leaving, as she passed, a hasty little kiss on Gertrude's cheek.

"I wish to tell you, for every reason," Gertrude replied in her low, vibrating tones, "if I may — if you have patience — if it will not be too long and stupid."

"Very well, my child. Remember it is a life for which I care."

"And I *have* been out walking with Lieut. von Falkenstein!" Gertrude stated, beginning in eager, honorable haste, with the end of her story.

"I know. I heard you say so the first day I saw you," aunt Serena reassuringly remarked, as if the German army were a trifle to be left on one side until more weighty matters had been discussed.

Gertrude looked at her gravely. Here was a woman who evidently regarded a young girl's life as more important than a young man's uniform, — who cared to know what was in the heart, and not the accidents of her temporary position.

"I am nineteen," she began again.

"Only a year and a half older than Rose," said Miss Lennox with a little air of encouragement and approval. It seemed as if there were something praiseworthy in the mere fact of being nineteen. Gertrude smiled in spite of herself.

Aunt Serena was leaning comfortably in the tall oak-chair. She looked small and fragile against its massive back. She wore a sober dove-gray morning-gown, with soft old lace at the throat and wrists. In her gentle hand was the dark-red rose. Sometimes she looked at the rose, sometimes she looked at Gertrude. There was nothing formal in her way of listening; yet the girl felt that this benign being was there, all there, — the charitable heart, the delicate, rapid intuition, the brain with its close attention, its clear, calm judgment, — for her.

Aunt Serena was not one of those much-vaunted,

exemplary, elderly ladies who are never known to sit idle, or to lean their aged frames against a convenient prop. Her hands were skilled in all kinds of womanly work, her days were full to overflowing; but her industry was not clamorous, her energies were unobtrusive.

She was a woman to whom people were apt to bring their secrets. Over-burdened hearts poured themselves out before her, as in a still and safe confessional. At such moments she would listen, at rest in mind and body, until the very peace of her presence would calm troubled waves of feeling. "A human spirit strives to show itself to me," was her simple and tender reflection; "its hidden thoughts, its aspirations, its pathetic losses. I cannot, if I would, see it as it is, or reach it or aid it much. But at least I can do it reverence. Shall I bring my needlework where an imprisoned king struggles to escape?"

Courteous and restful, she now listened to the young girl, who with a troubled air was saying, —

"I am not two years older than Rose, yet ages older than she will ever be."

"And who knows that, Gertrude?" said Rose herself with soft seriousness, clasping two large green jars in her slender arms, and standing a moment in deep thought.

"You are right," Gertrude replied gently. "No one knows. But it seems so, and I hope so."

Rose hesitated. "I will leave her to aunt Serena," she thought, walking slowly out with her

jars, which seemed to occupy considerable time; for she did not return at once.

"It may be my own fault that things have been hard for me," Gertrude began: "but, Miss Lennox, I do become very obstinate when uncle Charles insists that I must be a teacher; for I have not the least gift of imparting the little I know. I could at best only teach German and music to little children, and I have neither taste nor talent for such a life. Above all, I have not patience for it. I know that a great many girls, with what we call musical organizations, teach patiently and well. A girl no older than I comes to Molly and Daisy Lancaster, and helps them prepare their lessons for the Conservatory. She is as sensitive as I am, and a better musician, and not as strong physically. I don't know whether it will kill her or not. My private opinion is that it will, but I probably shall not be here to see. As for me, I loathe it. It makes me irritable and nervous, and miserable in soul and body: and, what is more, it makes my own music hideous to me; and my music is the one lovely thing in my life, — or was until you and Rose came," she added timidly. Aunt Serena looked at her with kind composure, and said nothing.

"I'm talking queerly, am I not? I do not know how to tell it in a proper autobiography style. I forget that you don't know uncle Charles. I am afraid I shall tell it very badly. You know, I never told it before;" and Gertrude spoke with some agitation.

"Tell it just as it comes, my child," said aunt Serena's calm voice.

"Uncle Charles is not unkind. I suppose he is a very good man, even if I do not like him much. Do not think I consider myself a victim to anybody's cruelty. Other girls have trouble too. Perhaps it is cowardly in me to come to you in this way. But since I have known you, it has seemed to me that you and Rose were pure harmony, and I was out of tune with myself and the whole world; and I thought the great crashing discords would"— She paused confused, hardly knowing what she wished to say.

"They may not be discords, child, only strong transition chords. How do you know, indeed, when you stand too near to hear them clearly? They may lead from a stormy theme into a melody beautiful beyond your imagining. And if they are discords! What then? They, too, are needful. They are potent in life's harmonies. No masterhand writes lullabies alone. Must I tell our chief musician, our sweet singer, this?" and she smiled into Gertrude's troubled eyes.

"Yes, I know; but I am tired:" and her brave young voice quivered slightly. Recovering herself, she said lightly, "I have been disagreeing constantly with my uncle for one thing; and that in itself is fatiguing, for he is as tenacious of his opinion as I am of mine. He says I must submit to the inevitable, and I tell him I want to find out first what the inevitable is. He thinks me proud. He warns

me that 'a haughty spirit goeth before destruction.' He likes phrases, you see. He says we are all vile worms. I never feel so. How can one do honest work in the world, even the little one is called upon to do, if one believes one is only a mean, crawling thing, fated to be stepped upon, or gobbled up by some cruel beak. I may as well confess that I am not humble."

"I never thought you were, my dear," said aunt Serena demurely.

"O Gertrude, Gertrude, I hear you!" cried Rose, appearing again. "You are quite as bad as I. I never was humble, either."

"You are two dangerous revolutionists. Rosamond is the worse, because her desire to overthrow and destroy is innate; while yours, Gertrude, is more pardonable, having been roused by contact with the hard world. How shall I reduce you young rebels to submission? What shall I do with you?"

Rose responded with a happy little laugh, and withdrew. But Gertrude said vehemently, "What you will; any thing, now that you have classed me with Rose."

"You are more like my impetuous Rose than I would have imagined such a pale, calm girl could ever be;" and aunt Serena laid her hand lightly on Gertrude's.

Gertrude was longing to speak unreservedly. She was eager to confess, and receive absolution from this dear and saintly priestess. But the habit of

reticence had taken firm root in her young soul; and when she would fain disclose her griefs and cares, the words died on her lips. Indeed, why was it necessary? Was not this fine old lady a reader of hearts? Would not her wonderful prescience reveal more than a girl's awkward, lame recital? But aunt Serena, unconscious of the magic powers attributed to her, waited as if she were not waiting, watched as if she were not watching, and, by the silent might of her womanliness, controlled the questioning, uneasy spirit.

"May I sit down low on the cushion, like Rose?" Gertrude asked shyly.

Aunt Serena reached over to the sofa, pulled the cushion down, and made a kindly, inviting gesture in a familiar, motherly way, as if it were as natural for one of her girls as for the other, to sit at her feet.

Gertrude, with bowed head and drooping eyelids, her hands working a little nervously, said, —

"There are ugly things in my life, Miss Lennox. They began when I was very young. I was not responsible for them; but they have influenced most people's estimation of me, and haunted me always. I used to be very confused and miserable in my own ideas. It seemed to me I could never separate myself from the acts of other people. But now I believe every soul stands alone. And I grieve and mourn for what happened; but I will not blush or be ashamed any more, unless I blush for myself: why should I?" And she threw back her head with a certain defiance in her face.

She met only the earnest gaze of the kindest eyes in the world, and saw a tender mouth with the pathetic lines that renunciation draws; and, more gently than any one had ever spoken to her, a voice murmured, —

"Why, indeed, my child?"

Her face softened; her eyes flashed one eloquent, grateful glance upwards, then drooped as before; and she went on rapidly, —

"I was only a little girl when it happened. I was nearly twelve years old; but I was an old-fashioned child, and was playing with my doll. She was almost as large as I, I remember. I was carrying her down stairs one day. I had come from mamma's room. She was an invalid, and rarely left her room. And I heard a great noise. I ran into papa's study; and — I saw him lying there. He had shot himself, you know, — and I was only a little girl, and I was the one who found him;" and she covered her eyes. Two tender hands rested with a great compassion on the fair head.

"I put my doll before my face, and stood still, and shrieked. I could not stir, but I shrieked until they came and took me away. I never touched a doll again. I never was a little girl any more. Months after I used to see poor papa in my sleep, and wake myself with cries of terror. It frightened my very life. It frightened the blood from my cheeks and the youth from my heart, and left me pallid and joyless.

"Then came ghastly weeks. Mamma was very

ill. I could scarcely see her. The servants went about whispering. I used to cry days until I was too weary to cry more; for I loved papa, and missed him keenly. He was very good to me. Nights my awful dream never forsook me. Uncle Charles came in and out, and always told me I must be reconciled. Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth. I hardly knew what he meant. I was a wretched, neglected child. There was no one to comfort me. I was naturally reconciled to nothing. My little sister Ruth was born, and mamma died. This was another shock and grief; still, I sorrowed most for papa. They took us then to uncle Charles's house; but he had four daughters himself, and soon he sent me to boarding-school. I have been in different schools ever since, until last year.

"Are you tired of me?" she asked abruptly.

Aunt Serena's smile was the only answer.

"It is a wonder," Gertrude said simply. "I was in a small school in New York two years. At first I was lonely and shy; but the second year I was happier, because a new girl came who was very winning, and bright as a sunbeam. I thought her an angel. We became intimate friends. I idolized her, telling her every thing, except that of which I never spoke. One day she came to me with a proper little air, and no constraint or hesitation. 'Gertrude,' she said, 'I am very sorry; but I have just heard about your father, and I think mamma would hardly like me to be intimate with you.' She looked so pretty as she said it. She had beautiful

warm chestnut hair, like Rose; and she tossed it back, and smiled at one of the governesses who was passing. Everybody loved her, I most of all. I was so stunned and dull I did not blame her. It did not occur to me then that she did wrong. I have heard of her and seen her since. The world calls her a most lovely character;" and Gertrude smiled.

"How old was she?"

"Fourteen. A little older than I."

"Fourteen in a girl is hardly young enough for an act of mere thoughtless, childish brutality," aunt Serena said gravely.

"Oh, no. She was not thoughtless. She knew quite well what she did. She would do it again, or a similar thing, whenever it suited her convenience. But she would never say an unlady-like word, never make an abrupt gesture. She is very attractive.

"After that I grew depressed and silent again. I was conscious that I was pointed out to new girls, and that my story was told to them. Now and then it seemed to me people knew more than I did. Once I distinctly heard some one say, 'dishonor and suicide.' It filled me with new horrors. I was moody and ill. I think now, as I look back, that I really suffered very much at that time; but no one knew it. They only thought me peculiar. No doubt there were girls there who would have been generous and good, if I could have told them how miserable I was. But I did not know how to take the weight off my heart. I was a little, white,

silent, unattractive girl. Do not think I am blaming them. They were always kind enough to me, but I felt as if a great gulf was fixed between them and me. The only time I forgot it was when I was happy with Lilian. Ah! I did not intend to mention her name," Gertrude said hurriedly. "I am sorry. It is quite possible that you may meet her."

"Why should you not mention her name to me?" aunt Serena asked with a searching look.

Gertrude hesitated. "I do not like to complain of people, if I do abuse fate roundly now and then; and I have a theory that it is mean not to let everybody have a fair start. You might meet her, and like her. Why not? It is not my affair. But she would hardly have a fair start, if she were weighed down with that one thing she said when she was fourteen."

"No, she would not," said aunt Serena very gently and with a singular smile. "But you say you think she would do it again."

"Yes," replied Gertrude with quiet decision, "I am sure. She stood by me in the Dresden Gallery, before the Sistine Madonna, two years after, and looked me freely in the face with no sign of recognition. She was with her mamma."

"You spoke?"

"I said, 'O Lilian!' It was foolish, but quite involuntary. I came suddenly upon them, and I had seen no one from home in a long time. She looked so very pretty, you understand."

"Yes, dear. I think I am beginning to understand you."

"It hurt me, I must admit; but I might have known she would do it. That last winter in New York she had spoken politely to me always. She was the most civil girl there. Her manners were the pride of the school. We simply ceased to be intimate. She changed her room, and her tone to me. She knew how to put little *nuances* of meaning into her face and voice as well as her mamma did; but she was never rude, and she always spoke, — when she could not avoid seeing me. Of course, she had the right to recognize me or not when she was older.

"But I did not tell you how I came to Dresden. I was pale and thin, no credit to the school, and no favorite with the teachers. They thought me sullen. Perhaps I was. At all events, I could not have merry, amiable ways like other girls. A great hush seemed to have fallen upon me.

"Then I heard of a girl who had gone to Germany, and I gave uncle Charles no peace until he had consented to send me away. It seemed to me I might be able to begin fresh in a strange land. He was really not averse to the idea. The care of me has always made him uncomfortable, and he has daughters enough of his own. My cousins were never at the same school with me. It would have been embarrassing to them. It need not have been. Papa was much nobler and lovelier than uncle Charles; and even if misfortune did come, and he

was desperate, he had been always generous and kind to every mortal. Poor papa!" She stopped and looked directly into the gentle, attentive face. "Perhaps I ought to tell you that there was what they call dishonor there. When I was little I never knew why he did it. I thought it was because he was unhappy. But uncle Charles has told me there were money difficulties, and something wrong. Perhaps I could explain it more clearly, if you wish," with a distressed look.

"I do not wish. You have explained it quite clearly enough."

"I only wished you to know all. He had asked uncle Charles for help, but he would not ask but once. Papa was very proud and sensitive. I cannot understand myself how such dreadful complications ever arose; but I think papa was good, — in his own nature I mean. I shall always think so," and she looked at Miss Lennox sadly. In her eyes was a mute appeal.

"He must have been a miserable, tortured soul," said aunt Serena.

"Yes," assented the girl gratefully. "That is what I always think. He did not know what he did. Well," she went on wearily, "it is not a very interesting tale, as you must acknowledge. Uncle Charles was upon the whole relieved to have me come away. I think it was a wise thing; for I ceased to remind them all of a disgrace, and I could breathe more freely myself. Ruth, my little sister, was too young to care. I came to a school

near Dresden. I was not quite fifteen then. I don't know whether it was the voyage that did me good, or the novelty; but I grew brighter and happier at once. I no longer felt as if there were a curse overshadowing me.

"Only once was any ungenerous allusion made. One of the younger governesses was rebuking four or five of us for some neglect of duty. I do not know how she knew. Such bitter things have wings, and fly from shore to shore. Then, afterwards, indeed, I heard she had given German lessons to some children in a New-York family, then living in Dresden. She said, 'It is inexcusable in you all, but particularly in Miss Peyton, who ought always to remember she should not claim too much indulgence.' The girls were simple, good-natured creatures, and attached no meaning to her words. They may have thought she singled me out because I was taller than the others. But I went straight to her room. I don't know what I said. I was mad with rage. I was at a white heat. I forbade her ever to speak to me or of me again. I had begun to have a little comfort. Something within me asserted its right to it. I would not give up my chances without a struggle. I would not blame papa; but neither would I lose myself again in that black shadow. She reported that I stood there with flaming eyes and a deathly face, — 'like a fiend,' she said, — tearing my handkerchief into strips, and telling her, in a low, unearthly voice, that I would kill her if she did not let me alone.

She left soon after that; and although I was reprimanded for improper language, I always imagined that the principal looked leniently upon my blinding tornado of wrath, and that the indiscreet governess had been dismissed on my account. I presume the poor thing meant no harm. She was stupid and without tact, and wished to be important. But you see, I had borne all I could. I refused to accept needless suffering. Then things went on very quietly. It was pleasant enough there. Only, you know, I never had the feeling of belonging to anybody; and I never dared be intimate with any girl after Lilian. I staid a long time, — until my eighteenth birthday. The last year I was pupil teacher, so I know from experience what a poor instructor of youth I make. They would take me back. They give me a good character." She smiled rather sadly. "I cannot say there is not a respectable occupation and a respectable home awaiting me. I ought to be grateful. The time may come when I shall go back to it, but I hope I may die before I must. I hope I may die first.

"Last year I went home to see Ruth. She is seven years old now, and the dearest little girl, but very, very delicate. She cried so when I came away, and it broke my heart to leave her. She is the one thing that belongs to me, and I want her. I hunger and thirst for her. But they do right to keep her. She has to have the doctor constantly. She doesn't seem to grow very much," Gertrude said mournfully; "but some day, I think, she will.

Some day I will have her with me. I will take care of her; and if there is skill enough in the world, I will make her strong. If there is not, I will make her happier than any strong child.

"This is my castle in the air, but it is weary work reaching it. Uncle Charles says the sensible thing for me to do is to accept the inevitable, and teach in the Dresden school. Miss Lennox, if I should do that, I could not earn enough to take Ruth. He says Ruth is well off where she is; and if they are willing to have her there, I ought not to complain. Ruth is comfortable, but she is not happy. Indeed, the little thing is not happy; and she grows so glad with me, and loses the pitiful look round her mouth. Why, one day, when I was there, she laughed till she could hardly stop, like any child. You know we have very little, Ruthie and I, only a trifle mamma left. Uncle Charles helped pay for my education until I was eighteen. It was kind; but I shall repay it later," she added with some coldness. "I should be sorry to deprive my cousins of their rights. Now he insists that I must teach. He says that the world is full of impoverished women of good family who have resorted to teaching as the most respectable way of supporting themselves."

"And you?"

"I insist that it is not respectable, but dishonest, to do for money what one is not fitted to do well. And more than that, when they discovered my voice was promising, and advised me to come here, I flatly refused to teach; and I persisted in coming to

Wynburg: and — I hope it is not too tedious in me to tell you such things — I am drawing from my little capital in order to study here. Of course uncle Charles does not like it. But my voice is my one hope. I would rather risk all, and lose all if I must, than doom myself to a life of dishonest drudgery. They say here I am studying for the stage. I never deny it. I wish I were. But I am not sure that I have dramatic talent; and then, you know, it takes money and influence to push one forward nowadays, there are so many aspirants. Still, if the opportunity should present itself, I should not hesitate. Meanwhile I work as hard as I can at my music. Perhaps I might be a church-singer somewhere at home, and even teach, if I might choose my pupils. But that is the trouble. If one teaches, one can't choose unless one is a celebrated person, and can afford to be fastidious and tyrannical. I am afraid I should be sending them away when they sang false, and then poor little Ruth would starve. But a great opera-singer earns her thousands upon thousands, and Ruth would have her carriage."

"I don't know much about the stage," aunt Serena remarked thoughtfully, trying to imagine this fair girl before the footlights.

"There is very little prospect of my knowing any more of it than I do now," Gertrude said with a dry little laugh. "It is all visionary on my part. But I must decide upon something before long. They say I am going on the stage, merely because one of the professors at the Conservatory happened to declare that I had voice enough."

"And your uncle Charles?"

"Would object, and disown me, unless I should become a famous singer, when he would be at my feet."

"He is not in easy circumstances himself, I infer from your story," Miss Lennox remarked with some hesitation. "Otherwise he would not separate you and your little sister."

Gertrude laughed.

"He has four fashionable daughters, and he lives in an elegant house in New York. They are not poor; but the girls are very gay, and no doubt he has expenditures enough. He would not refuse me shelter if I could accept it. I could not. I would rather teach," she added quietly. "You do not know my cousins. I could not live in any dependent position with them. Then, they would object to it as much as I. It would not be an enviable life, believe me. Yes, I would rather teach in Dresden," she repeated.

"Pardon me, my dear, that I ventured to question you."

"Oh, please ask any thing you would care to know! I have never told any one what I am telling you, and now I am inundating you with my confidences. Yet I am telling it very poorly. It is little to tell, after all. You are so good to listen, but it is strange enough to me to be talking of myself."

"No older woman has offered you aid and sympathy? Is it possible that you have not opened your young, oppressed heart in all these years?"

"I have had neither desire nor opportunity," Gertrude answered calmly. Then, with ardor, "Dear Miss Lennox, I have not seemed to need any thing. No one but you has suspected that I was in deadly want. No one else had the courage to believe in me without examining my credentials. If you had not had faith in me before hearing my story, I would not have told it to you. I make no explanations to people who doubt me;" and she drew herself up with her haughty air.

"I understand that very well; but could you perhaps have seemed defiant, and repelled well-meant advances? Is this not possible?" said the harmless, honest voice.

"It is possible, yet I think it has not happened. I am defiant, but not of kindness. I have been too famishing for warm human sympathy to reject it, had it been proffered. But some instinct warns me when low curiosity prompts a seeming interest. Do not misunderstand. I cannot doubt that there are kind hearts everywhere. But it has happened that I have not met with them, or those which I have met are content in their own circles. After all, as I said before, there is nothing in me which would appeal to them; and my life has been commonplace enough, except for the gloom that came upon it seven years ago, which I feel still as a great and terrible sorrow, but which I refuse to regard as a disgrace. There are women here who would enjoy taking my lonely condition for a theme, and playing variations upon it from *pension* to *pension*. It is

possible, if I could have confided in them, I might even have been petted and patronized for a season. They like any kind of sensation. But I take the liberty of reserving my feelings and thoughts for myself; and they, in revenge, comment merely upon superficial, unimportant matters. This cannot hurt me, the real me, however."

"The real me has been talking a long time," said aunt Serena affectionately. "Will she rest a moment? and if, as I imagine, we are coming to Wynburg, may I call Rose? Or would it be better if she should still wait?"

"Oh, let me call her! She might have been here all the time. It was only that I was awkward at the beginning. But I am glad that I have spoken, and that the sad, dull, poor little story is almost told."

Aunt Serena rose. "Dear child," she said slowly, "I thank you from my heart that you have trusted your story to me. I shall not tell you all that I think of it; but believe me, I find it neither dull nor poor:" and then she kissed her on her lips. "As she kisses Rose! As she kisses Rose!" exulted Gertrude.

Rose was reading in her own room. Being summoned, she came, bringing with her the rich, warm, innocent gladness that distinguished her. Yet it did not conflict with Gertrude's graver mood. Indeed, Rose supplied what Gertrude needed.

"Aunt Serena, I have filled all the vases in the most æsthetic manner, also the big jars, and a large

basket and a little one, and whatever dishes, not too suggestive of vegetables, that I could beg or borrow from Frau Rudolph; and still there are roses and roses and roses. I think Mr. Sydney Bruce is a most charming person. '*C'est mon opinion, et je la partage.*'" She glanced furtively at Gertrude with soft, sympathetic eyes.

"We all share that opinion, — I, with reason, most of all," said aunt Serena, bringing a small glass of wine. "Drink this, my dear. It is my special wine, and you are fatigued."

"It is Greek wine, Gertrude. Aunt Serena had a great box brought to her years ago at home. She had just used the last bottle when we came away. Finding the same kind here has reconciled her to Wynburg. She has never, to my knowledge, swallowed a thimbleful herself; but she administers it to her friends as a universal panacea. Fevers, colds, headaches, neuralgia, sprained ankles, and broken hearts are all treated at the Nest with Greek wine, in that very tiny antique glass; and, what is more, it always cures."

Miss Lennox was, however, at this moment, also sipping the red nectar. "I am afflicted with neither of the ills you mention, Rose; but this has been a full and exciting morning for a recluse like me."

"Are you not too tired to have me go on?" Gertrude asked anxiously.

"Indeed, no. Rose, Gertrude is going to tell us now what her experience in Wynburg has been."

"Ah? You have had dinner, and I am allowed

to come in at dessert. Are there any sweets left, Gertrude?"

"Yes, Lieut. von Falkenstein;" and the two girls laughed with no apparent reason, as girls will, Gertrude as heartily as Rose. "That is well," thought aunt Serena. "Rose is good for her, and the child has not the slightest sensitiveness in regard to this young man. Poor, poor dear! What a barren, weary, cruel way she has trod through these years of her girlhood, and not a complaint, not a reproach, not a harsh word for one of them. And Lilian must have a fair start! Well, well, we will see."

"Go on, my child, my other child," she said very sweetly.

Gertrude's world had grown warmer. She was no longer a waif. She was one of them. They had adopted her. It is as if she had said "Thou," she thought.

CHAPTER XV.

"There are who ask not if thine eye
Be on them; who, in love and truth,
Where no misgiving is, rely
Upon the genial sense of youth:
Glad hearts! without reproach or blot:
Who do thy work, and know it not."
WORDSWORTH: *Ode to Duty.*

"I WAS not at Frau Rudolph's at first," Gertrude began. "I was with a person some one had recommended to uncle Charles. When he found I would come whether or no, he made what arrangements he could for me. They told him she would be a mother to me. Her idea of maternal duties consisted apparently in examining my boxes and opening my letters. I had seen Frau Rudolph on the street, and knew she kept a *pension*. I came to her, and asked her if she had a room for me. 'Where you live?' she asked. I told her. 'Why you leave that house?' She knew I spoke German, for I told her I had been three or four years in Dresden. But she likes her English. 'Because she meddles with my boxes and opens my letters,' I said. Frau Rudolph laughed. 'I know that old fool. She do. She do,' she muttered. 'You have friends. Who sent you to me? You go much out

to tea? You have young miss often with you to speak and make noise?'

"'No one sent me to you. I have no friends. I am very quiet, and I am alone. I may disturb you with my music, but not with company.'

"'Why come to me?'—'Because I liked your face,' I answered bluntly; and she laughed again, and pointed at her comely countenance with a wise forefinger. 'My face is good face. My face is old cheat. My face he look honest, but he do not say my thought.' Then she led me to my little room, which, as I have discovered lately, the good soul gave me for two-thirds her regular price, probably making up for it by increasing some other person's board proportionately" ("Bless her!" murmured Rose); "and she has done her best for me ever since."

"Frau Rudolph takes the measure of every one under her roof. She knows us all, our characters and proclivities, sometimes, it seems to me, our very thoughts before we think them. She would not let me, a young girl all alone, stay here, if I were not really nice;" and Gertrude colored slightly. "But the people do not seem to think of that."

"What people, Gertrude?" asked aunt Serena.

"What people, indeed!" Gertrude repeated with a retrospective look. "Who can tell how a rumor, an impression, flies? No one originates it. No one owns it. But it travels far and wide, and does harm, and is sheltered and welcomed and fattened, and every one helps it along, and no one treads it under foot. Miss Lennox, I tell you frankly that if

you inquire about me in families that you will know here, in nine cases out of ten you will hear something unfavorable. You may think I exaggerate my own importance," and she smiled somewhat bitterly, "but I assure you I do not. I am only a Conservatory girl; but whenever I am spoken of at all, the chances are that it is with a curl of the lip."

"If it's merely a question of lip-curling!" and Rose's sweet mouth broke into innumerable scornful curves.

"I wish it were only that, dear. I think I ought to make you understand this, Miss Lennox," Gertrude went on. "I do not feel as if you were quite aware exactly how people speak of me. This thought embarrasses me often, and most when you are kindest. I could not let Rose associate with me unless you knew. I could no more deny myself the delight of knowing you and coming to you here, than I could turn away from food and drink when starving; but as to riding horseback and going everywhere with Rose, publicly" —

"Gertrude Peyton," cried Rose, "are you as crazy as the rest of them?"

"My dear child," and Miss Lennox spoke with mild but perceptible hauteur, "may I inquire for what you take us?"

Gertrude looked blankly from one to the other.

"Do you not see that you attribute to us the meanest kind of meanness?" exclaimed Rose.

"She is actually warning us against herself, poor lamb," thought aunt Serena; "but I cannot seem to interpret it so."

"Gertrude, you must admit that your own dignity, as well as ours, would forbid such a relationship."

"Does my aunt Serena look like a clandestine person?" inquired Rose solemnly.

"But I did not mean that. Rose is so beautiful," cried Gertrude, her rich voice throbbing with strong emotion, "and so — clean — before the world; and you do not know them, not even you, Miss Lennox, wise as you are. I could not bear to have them hurt her, and be myself the cause."

Aunt Serena's face was calm as a marble angel's, as she took Gertrude's hands in hers.

"Dear, we may as well begin to understand each other. In the first place, we consider you our friend, which settles half the question. In the next place, you give as much or more than you take, as I find you a most desirable companion for my niece Rosamond; which settles the other half. As to the people, whom, by the way," and she smiled with some amusement, "I regard as of very little importance, we will take them slowly — one by one — as they come."

A great light shone out of Gertrude's eyes. "You think me good for Rose, me?" she faltered, breathless with joy. "You not only tolerate me and are kind to me, but you think me of use to you?"

"Don't you know it, you clever, dull girl?" and Rose's glad, caressing tones, full of sweetness, full of laughter, sank into the depths of Gertrude's heart. "Are you too blind to see that we love you

and admire you? That your heroic little finger is worth all of me and many like me? That you make me ashamed of my easy life? That you are the dearest, loveliest, and bravest of girls? And that I am proud to form an alliance with you, offensive and defensive?"

Gertrude gave one long sigh of pure happiness.

"And you do not even ask me what they say?"

"I do not in the least care to know," said aunt Serena tranquilly.

"But now I want to tell you all;" and Gertrude sprang to her feet, and stood with her illumined face before them. "I want to tell you that there is not one act or word or thought of mine that I am ashamed to show you. I have pretended not to care for the people, but I do care. They hurt me. They wound me. They kill me. I have tried not to be weak enough to pity myself; but sometimes I could not help being sorry for that girl who was so very much alone, and working so hard, and trying only to find a way to make a home for her little sister, and always hunted down. I do not blame the people, at least not many of them. But they hurt me. At first everybody was kind at the Conservatory. Now the Americans avoid me. The German girls are gentle, but shy. They do not understand; and why should they go out of their own circles? The Americans, at best, are enigmas to them. Then, if my own country-women think me queer, they must evidently have some cause. Some of the American girls were cordial; but when they

found I did not know Mrs. Van Rensalaer, and Mrs. Raymond, and the others, they gradually dropped me. I have always been praised by my masters, and I hope it is not ill-natured in me to say that Kitty Van Rensalaer seemed to consider herself personally aggrieved by my progress. She stared at me, without returning my good-morning, as I went in to my piano-lesson, and she came out, one day. This was sufficient to exclude me from the polite world."

"But you are all children!" said Mrs. Lennox surprised.

"We are very precocious children, and Kitty represents her mamma," Gertrude replied with a smile. "Much begins with us children. Kitty Van Rensalaer and some others were, to speak plainly, jealous of my music. They need not have been," she said sadly. "It was all I had. But they did not know that. Kitty is not malicious, I think. She merely likes to be first."

"Gertrude," said Rose suddenly, "you talk to me as if I were a sleepy kitten, only fit to curl itself up and purr. Now, I am going to surprise you with my knowledge of the world. You are a very distinguished-looking girl. They were jealous of more than your music."

"I never thought of that," said Gertrude simply. "My pale, dull face" —

"So it began with those young girls?" asked Miss Lennox, ignoring the interruption.

"Yes; and I began to have my old Pariah feeling

again: although, as far as I know, people here do not know about *that*," and she looked at aunt Serena significantly. "And I was cold, and made no advances to any one, and stalked grimly in and out of the Conservatory; and no one had a good word for me, except the professors. Then, when one of them happened to make that remark about my voice, I was at once studying for the stage; and soon I had already been an actress in the remote past; and this was quite enough to frighten the timid girls, — and girls have right instincts, do they not? Of course, if my peers condemn me, I am lost. All the time I worked, and wrote little letters to Ruth, and drew myself more and more into my shell; and I never have been able to assimilate with any of the ladies in the house," with which quiet remark she disposed of the *pension*.

"Then came the von Falkenstein episode."

Into Gertrude's face darted the look of careless, girlish amusement that aunt Serena had gladly noticed before.

"Which is, it would seem, not a very serious affair," she said encouragingly.

"Which is pure comedy," Gertrude answered, "except in its consequences; and they have done me much harm."

"Gertrude, I am devoured by curiosity. I thought you would never come to the lieutenant. Molly and Daisy themselves could not be more excited than I."

"I am glad it is comedy, dear. You certainly

have a right to it. You have been telling me much of a different nature. May I say for your comfort, that you have lived so much in your nineteen years, and your inner life is so much richer than that of the people who have been careless enough to pain you, I think you need not be cast down?"

Gertrude said with grave thankfulness, —

"Now that I have you, yes. It is all different when one is quite alone. The evenings are long, and one sits and thinks. But it is quite possible that I have exaggerated little things," she said brightly. Already the people seemed kinder to her.

"Now for Lieut. von Falkenstein," and in her eyes came the laughter. "No one but you would believe me: but, indeed, he is the nicest boy in the world, and quite a boy, not much older than I am; and that is young for a man."

"He has a bright, boyish face," said aunt Serena, with certain reasons for having a strong interest in this narrative.

"He reminds me of Harold when he rides by," said Rose, "with his fair hair and fresh color, and debonair look."

"He has meant no harm," Gertrude went on eagerly, "and whatever fault there may have been is wholly my own. In the first place, the way we met was most extraordinary and romantic, or ridiculous, as one pleases to regard it. It's quite a long story. One day in the street I met one of the Dresden school-girls. She was making a little

journey with her father, and was in Wynburg only for that day. She was a good-natured, quiet German girl, whom I had not known very well; but she seemed moderately glad to see a familiar face: and when they politely asked me to drive with them, and do some sight-seeing, and dine with them at the hotel afterwards, you can imagine how glad I was to accept. Frau Rudolph looked as pleased as possible when they called for me. She came herself to the carriage, and gave me the house-keys, which are also the keys which unlock the Falkenstein mystery, and are as fatal as Bluebeard's."

"The keys?" said aunt Serena inquiringly. "We have but one. The key to the inner entrance-door. The main door of our floor."

"Yes. But you have not been out evenings yet; and by day the iron gate and the house-door are never closed, you know. When you have once come in after ten you will appreciate the ponderosity of German precautions. I had not before been out late, and had not my three keys together, as I have now;" and she drew them from her pocket for inspection. "I had not any keys at all, in fact. Frau Rudolph thought I might not come home early, and so kindly provided me with the means of entrance.

"We took our drive, and did not come back to the hotel until nine. Then we had some supper, and it was quite eleven when my friends walked up to the house with me. I felt elated, like any girl who has friends and goes out to drive. One ac-

customs one's self so quickly to pleasant things, you know. They stood there chatting on the pavement as I unlocked the great gate with key No. 1, closed it, and re-locked it. Then they waited until I had walked through the little court, applied key No. 2 to the lock of the house-door, after which they could not possibly do any more for me than to wish me a kind good-night. Between us was a locked gate. They had brought me safely home. Their minds were at rest, so was mine. They walked away; and I opened the heavy door, closed it behind me, locked it, and stood in utter darkness at the foot of the little first flight, carefully putting my two great keys in my pocket. Then, with perfect composure, I grasped my little glass-door key which was to let me into Frau Rudolph's habitation, and, feeling my way with my feet, began to ascend.

"It seemed very comical to me to be stealing up stairs like a thief in the night. I can give you no idea of the darkness. It was perfectly black. I went on slowly, but cheerfully, wondering if everybody over here had had the same curious experience; presuming that genteel people ordered their maids or footmen when they went out to tea; trying to decide upon the best mode of action in case one has neither; and determining that if ever I should be invited anywhere again, I would, at least, provide myself with a box of matches and a taper. I crept up the first little flight, and the long flight, and came to our door. Gently, so that I should wake no one, I put the key in, and tried to turn it. To my great

amazement it would not turn. In vain I strained my wrist, and nearly sprained my thumb. I drew it out, and inserted it in a different way, in a wily and enticing manner; but neither by force nor art could I turn that key a hair's-breadth. It was incredible. I felt annoyed. I turned, looked behind me, and saw only a faint glimmer over the stairs. It was not light. It was only a little less black, and showed where the ground-glass window was. I knew that people in the dark become strangely confused, and it occurred to me I might have come up too many flights. I was sure I had not, but something was wrong. It might be I. So back I crept down the stairs, counting them, clinging to the balusters, slow, and determined not to be nervous and foolish. I went down the long flight. Right so far. I crossed the little landing. I went down the short flight. I stood in the lower corridor, and put my hands on the massive house-door. There was no mistake. I was still quite cool, and once more made my deliberate ascent of the very slippery stairway, counting again with painful decision, and with renewed hope applied my perverse key to Frau Rudolph's entrance-door. The result was as before. There is no help for it, I thought: I must ring, and wake them all. I am sorry, but I have done my best; and I cannot sit on the stairs all night. So I rang, timidly, reluctantly, deprecatingly, because I must, and not because I would. The bell sounded but too loud, I thought, in the silent night. Eager to enter, I pressed my cheek against the door. No

one came. Not a sound could I hear. Then I rang again, boldly, repeatedly, with no hesitation or scruples; the bell pealed out without mercy, and the wire shook angrily; then the noise died away, and utter silence followed; and I was there alone, and, as far as I knew, likely to be there until morning. I was desperate; pulled the bell and worked at the lock by turns until I was tired. I am ashamed to say I grew nervous. It may have been the strong tea which I had drunk at the hotel; but I began to see grinning, ghastly faces in the darkness, hands reached out to clutch me. I heard all the clocks strike twelve, and then the little silver bell of the church-tower. I seized the door, shook it and pounded it frantically; but I had only lame knuckles for my pains. I repeated poetry to take up the time. I remembered Constance de Beverley and the vestal virgins, and the poor man immured in the foundations of the Rath Haus at old Rothenburg on the Tauber, and all the appalling tales I had ever read of dark dungeons growing smaller each day until they crushed the unhappy wretch within; and though I knew I was in the corridor, with six long flights, and air enough for an army, I felt half suffocated. You have no idea of the foolish, extravagant fancies I had, or how dreadful the darkness grew.

"Soon after twelve the iron gate opened and closed with a loud clang. I heard a heavy, stumbling step, and then the slam of the house-door. I shrank back into the corner and faced the stairway,

my eyes staring towards the invisible approaching figure. Very slowly, step by step, the man came nearer and nearer, so near that the fumes of liquor reached me as he passed; and it seemed to me he must touch me. I scarcely breathed until he had mounted to the very top of the house, and shut a door behind him. I felt faint from fright. I thought I would go out in the street. It would be lighter there, and one would not be so penned up. I could at least run away if any thing should frighten me. Suddenly the iron gate clanged again, and again my heart stood still. Presently the great house-door closed, gently this time; and on the stairs sounded a firm, even step, the clicking of spurs, and a swinging sabre. It was all like the pealing of joy-bells to me. Now I am safe. Now my distress is over. I thought, with the inborn confidence with which an American girl relies upon even a stranger's protection, 'This is the young lieutenant. They all speak well of him. He will take care of me, and open that dreadful door.' He came on rapidly. He must have been on the fourth or fifth stair from the landing where I stood straining my eyes to see him, when, in a tolerably cheerful voice, all things considered, I began, 'Oh, if you please, Herr Lieutenant'— 'Who is there?' a stern voice thundered at me; and not another step did the young man take. There he stood, on guard, on his step, and there I stood on mine, disappointed, trembling, more alarmed than I had been at all, and utterly at a loss to know why he was so appalling.

A woeful figure indeed I was, not worth his challenge; but this the darkness did not reveal. Of course, absorbed in my own troubles, I did not realize the effect of my voice upon him, rising as it did from midnight shades.

"We both stood in silence, how long I do not know.

"'Who is there?' he growled again.

"He has told me since that I sounded as if I were about to burst into tears as I answered, in a feeble and disconnected manner, 'I am sure, I think it is very trying. I have stood here in the dark an hour and a half at least, and I thought you would open it.'

"Without abandoning his position, he discreetly lighted a match. By its flickering and insufficient flame I saw Lieut. von Falkenstein in gala uniform, and he saw me. Obviously I was not intimidating. The match went out; and he, with a marvellously softened voice, said, —

"'Open what?'

"'The door, of course,' said I with some irritation.

"'Oh, the door! Do you live here?'

"'Yes, when I can get in,' I answered again not very amiably.

"He gave a little subdued laugh. I am afraid I laughed as well. It was so delicious to have some one to speak to. He seemed companionable and kind. My spirits rose. He lighted another match. Again I saw his blond face, grave and civil, but

with a gleam of mirth in it: then the blue and silver of his uniform vanished in the darkness. He came forward.

"'I beg your pardon. Will you give me your key?'

"'Our hands met awkwardly in the darkness. He took the key, and tried to turn it in the lock. I must confess I felt a sensation of relief as well as perplexity when he, with his man's strength, succeeded no better than I. He then tried his own keys, with no better result.

"'If you will kindly wait an instant,' he said very civilly.

"I laughed again. What could I do but wait? 'I have been waiting since a little after eleven o'clock,' I said demurely. 'I think a minute more or less won't matter.'

"'I was about to say that I would go up to my rooms, bring a lantern and all my keys, and then I am sure I can open it.'

"'Thanks. If you will be so kind.'

"He had sprung half way up the next flight, when — it seems strange, but it was a night of wonders, you know — I heard some one on the inside of our door, and it softly opened.

"'Don't open it wide, for the world, Miss Peyton,' whispered a voice ineffably modest in spite of the darkness. 'I am in such dishabille. I should expire if your friend should see me.'

"'Lieut. von Falkenstein,' I called out, 'I shall not need your lantern. I thank you very much for your kindness. Good-night.'

"And before he could reply, I slipped through, and stood at last safe in the inner corridor.

"The lady who let me in lighted a candle, and" —

"Who was the lady?" asked Miss Lennox. "It is not idle curiosity that leads me to inquire, Gertrude."

"It was Mrs. Vivien."

"Ah? and why, then, had not Mrs. Vivien opened the door before?"

"She said she had heard a fumbling at the lock, and thought it might be one of the students in an intoxicated condition; and then she went to sleep again. Of course it did not devolve upon her to open the door. She slept through all the bell-ringing, she said. She was only roused the second time by the man's voice," — Gertrude explained, innocent of any attempt at satire, — "her room being next to the door."

"She must be a sound sleeper," said aunt Serena dryly. "Where was Frau Rudolph?"

"Curiously enough, out of the house. That one night she staid with her sister whose child was ill."

"And the servants?"

"Oh, they sleep in the attic."

"And why did not Bäbele come for you, and bring you home properly?"

"I do not know. Frau Rudolph did not know what time to send her perhaps; and then, my friends proposed bringing me home."

"And what was the matter with the key?"

"That was the grand misfortune. It was a mistake of the locksmith, who had sent home new keys that day. Frau Rudolph took it for granted it was right, and had not tried this one. The man had never made a mistake before."

"Did Mrs. Vivien understand it all?"

"Perfectly. She was really kind that night. She insisted upon coming into my room and giving me something warm to drink; and I told her the whole story. She laughed immoderately, I remember."

Aunt Serena looked grave.

"She knew that you had never spoken with Lieut. von Falkenstein before?"

"Oh, yes! She has never troubled me about that," Gertrude added frankly. "Of course I do not pretend to like her. We do not sympathize. But even she, I think, would not misrepresent any thing so palpably innocent as that experience. The next day she shook her finger at me, and said, 'Oh, you sly rogue! Girls will be girls.' I did not know what she meant, and never asked."

"Gertrude, you are ungrateful," said Rosamond. "Do you know nothing ever happened to me in all my life so interesting as this adventure with a beautiful blue-and-silver lieutenant?"

"But it has not resulted well, unfortunately," Gertrude continued. "The next day he came to Frau Rudolph, and asked how the young lady was who had such an unpleasant experience, — if she had taken cold, — if she was quite recovered."

"Frau Rudolph considered his solicitude not unnatural, and let me answer for myself, in her little reception-room and in her presence. Of course we could not be very formal after so absurd a meeting. He described his own perturbation. 'How was I to know?' said he. 'Why, you might have been a thief, or a murderer, or an — any thing!' and he told me the flickering match had revealed such a white, imploring face, his wrath at being startled was appeased at once. He has, since then, seen me there in Frau Rudolph's presence about once in six weeks; and then, — I have been to walk with him three times."

"And is that your very worst crime, Gertrude?" said aunt Serena pleasantly, but with a strongly observant expression.

"It is a crime here," the young girl admitted. "I know that perfectly well. But I was reckless, because I had nothing to lose. I was avoided. I was pointed out as eccentric and queer. I had been an actress, was going to be an actress, was an actress: as if that in itself were any harm, had it been true. I do not wish to exculpate myself. Of course I might have been careful and discreet still. But the truth is, it hardly seemed worth while. I had done the best I could, and every thing was as uncomfortable as possible. So I thought, why need I try to please the world?"

"And you pleased yourself, and went to walk with the young baron?"

"Yes."

"How did it happen, dear?" aunt Serena asked in her quiet, friendly way. "I must plead guilty to vast interest in the lieutenant. I share the weakness of Daisy and Molly and my niece."

"I am always inclined to laugh when I allude to him. It is all, to speak plainly, such a tempest in a teapot. It looks so ominous, and is, in reality, so funny. The first time I walked with him, it was an accident. It was broad daylight, five o'clock; and I was hurrying home, and met him two blocks from the house, coming the same way. I had seen him repeatedly, then, you know; and we had never been very ceremonious. It was hardly possible after that absurd midnight meeting."

"Naturally," acquiesced aunt Serena.

"So we walked on together, chatting and laughing. He is very amusing and light-hearted. I was not aware that the strictest person would object. I did not think of etiquette, in fact. But we met Molly and Daisy's awe-struck faces at the gate; and I saw Mrs. Vivien at the window; and at supper the colonels' lambs seemed to shrink smaller and smaller, in their desire to get away from me; and Mrs. Lancaster's virtuous air was conspicuously rampant; and I was made to feel that I was ostracized beyond hope of recall. I did not know whether to be angry or laugh. They all seemed very petty and contemptible. I am afraid I considered myself rather superior to them. Still, they were stronger than I; and they have left nothing undone to show their horror of me and their fear of contamination.

Frau Rudolph went about chuckling, and often brought nice little dishes to my room; but not one unguarded word did she say.

"And the second walk was half an accident. I had been working very hard all day, with my piano and my voice; and then I had some sewing to finish: and it was a warm evening in September, some weeks before you came. After supper, about half-past seven, I longed for a little air. I thought I would take a brisk walk round the square. I ran down stairs, and met Lieut. von Falkenstein at the gate."

"Accidentally?" said aunt Serena.

"Accidentally," replied Gertrude firmly, with clear, unshrinking eyes. "He stopped short, and asked me if he might not escort me wherever I was going. I said I was going nowhere. Then he asked if he might not go nowhere with me. It was not very brilliant, but we both laughed."

"And you said yes?"

"Yes. I thought it would be pleasant," remarked Gertrude with *naïveté*. "And it was pleasant. We went very much farther than round the square. We walked to the top of the hill, and looked back at the city-lights. It was very nice and breezy."

"This is the most thrillingly interesting romance I ever heard," said Rose, laughing. "Was it very, very late when you came home?"

"It was nine, and they all knew. It made a grand excitement in the *pension*. And it was after that, I think, that the vague rumors began to *pré-*

ciser themselves; and they said the worst possible things." Gertrude colored.

Miss Lennox nodded gravely.

"I suppose I ought to feel differently about it. Sometimes I am scornful and indignant; but sometimes I really do not feel it at all. Perhaps I have grown callous. If they should say I was too independent and unamiable and defiant and indiscreet, I should feel it, and know that it was true. But they go too far, they go too far! It is all so impossibly remote from me. A girl can't feel it, when she hears she is a murderer or a thief, or has poisoned all her family, or any thing like that"—

"And the third time, my dear?"

"The third time was the evening before your first appearance at the dinner-table; and it was no accident at all, but a well-organized plan. He asked me to go. I wanted to go, and I went. We had a long walk and a very earnest talk."

There was a slight pause. At length aunt Serena said, —

"Gertrude, I think I understand you. But I do not understand Frau Rudolph or this young man."

"It is the rule of Frau Rudolph's life never to interfere," said the girl quietly. "I think, upon the whole, she does right. She is very wise. And she did go so far once as to show her kindly feeling towards me. She brought a little plate of macaroons to my room, and said in her queer way, —

"'Fräulein Gertrude, you are good *fräulein*, and,' with a significant jerk of her thumb towards the

next floor, 'he no harm. But they,'— and she gave a comprehensive wave of her two fat arms, as if to encircle the universe, but no one in particular, — 'great fools. Poor little one *fräulein* fight too much great fools; she get hurt, she get dead, and who sorrows? What for is that good, to fight so strong old fools?' And in a twinkling she drew herself up with an unmistakable imitation of Mrs. Lancaster; then as suddenly gave a side-glance, and looked deprecating, like Mrs. Vivien, and went off with her usual chuckle."

"She is an estimable woman," said aunt Serena heartily. "And, Gertrude, she told you the truth. But I am not going to begin my homily at present. I wish to return to our lieutenant. What is his position in the matter? How does he reconcile it with his own ideas of etiquette? I ask you directly, my child, as if you were Rosamond."

Gertrude smiled, well pleased, and in her simple, frank manner said, —

"I think at first he wanted to be 'American.' He has met nice American girls in Switzerland, — not loud, flirty ones, I imagine from what he has said, but really refined, pleasant girls, — and he has been allowed to escort them a short distance now and then; and he is quite enthusiastic over what he calls the American system. He says girls with us are not so likely to think a young man has intentions as German girls are, and not so sentimental; and altogether he raves about a sensible and frank intercourse."

"And therefore invites an unprotected young girl to take a late, dark walk with him, and considers that sensible, frank, and American?" sighed aunt Serena, with, however, a humorous rather than a horrified expression. "Oh, my country, thou art still an undiscovered land!"

Gertrude laughed. "I know it. I know it. Of course it seems so even to you. But indeed he is not to blame. He told me that last time that he was extremely annoyed to find people were gossipping, and he begged me not to misunderstand if he did not even call again very soon; and he was excessively indignant. Really, I think he is simply sorry for me. Frau Rudolph has told him I was alone, and that I worked hard, and had few pleasures. It seemed natural to me that he should call and ask her how I was, and not surprising when he came again. Of course, he might have been a different kind of person. But in that case I think I should also have been different," she said with her little dignified air. "I would not have seen him if he had been bold and familiar, as some of the officers look, even like some people whom my cousins receive in New York, and whom I found unendurable. For, after all, it isn't the nation, but the nature, that makes the difference. He is merry, yet always respectful. You know, I had seen him with Frau Rudolph many times for a half an hour or so, before I let him take that first walk with me. We are very good friends. His light-hearted ways refresh me like a breath of fresh air. He has told me

all about his family, and his father's estate, and his own hunting-dogs, and his mother, and his cousin Olga. He is engaged to be married to his cousin."

"Ah," said Miss Lennox softly.

"Oh, yes: and I have enjoyed him so much; he is so sunny. I really think you would like him."

"My dear, dear child, I am sure I should!" and aunt Serena, with a curious mixture of expressions, rose, walked to the recessed window, and stood a while. "It is better even than I had imagined," she thought with much satisfaction.

"Gertrude, may I ask you one more question?"

"A thousand," said the girl joyfully.

"Have you any reason to believe that your first meeting with Lieut. von Falkenstein at night has ever been mentioned in an unfavorable or a distorted manner?"

"Oh, no!" she said carelessly. "No one would take the trouble to misrepresent that. Everybody understood it, and we were so obviously irresponsible."

Aunt Serena, standing by Gertrude's chair, gently smoothed her cheek, now a little flushed from much speaking.

"Or perhaps it is being reserved as the best trump-card," she added playfully. "Who knows?"

"And you do not attribute your troubles to any one individual? You have given no one cause to feel any personal resentment or enmity to you?"

"No one. My troubles are due to fate, and people in general, and myself," replied the young

girl promptly. "The ladies do not like me here, because I am not of their kind. I do not like them, because they are not of my kind. They disapprove of me thoroughly. They assume what attitude they please towards me, according to the dictates of their various natures, and are not careful as to what they say of me or any one else, as you know. But still, they would not go out of their way to deliberately do me harm, I think. Why, that would be persecution! I have never considered myself quite a martyr," she said, laughing. "Indeed, I begin to think, to-day, that I have been making much ado about nothing," she added, with a happy, grateful ring in her voice.

"I have been forced to think about myself, of course; but I have given up trying to understand the girl-question. It is too distressingly complicated. Now, I know that one of our most admired and respected quiet American girls here, who is much liked in very exclusive foreign circles, said to a newcomer from America, 'You can do any thing you like, and have an awful amount of fun with the officers, — on the sly, — only, never smile at the theatre. Look solemn and wearily indifferent, and you'll be a success. I'll show you how to manage about notes and walks.' *I* would rather walk with a regiment of lieutenants than be capable of making that remark."

"Dear, dear!" sighed good aunt Serena, greatly dismayed. Here were complications indeed. Here were moral difficulties of which she had not dreamed

in Northbrooke. Well, let the statesmen take care of the systems! Meanwhile, she perhaps could at least sweep her own pavement.

"To return to your inquiry, there is Mrs. Vivien," Gertrude went on gayly. "A *résumé* of our hostilities would be superfluous. You have had the privilege of frequently seeing our encounters. But I must do her the justice to say that she attacks me honestly enough every day at dinner. It is true," she said thoughtfully, "although we have always been antagonistic, she dislikes me more than ever since I have known Lieut. von Falkenstein. If it is not too petty a thing to repeat, she met him somewhere in society, and asked him to call; and he went once, and never again. He does not like her, and merely puts his heels together and makes the funny little bow they give when he meets her, as he usually does on his way to Frau Rudolph's room. She described his visit to her very eloquently at dinner one day, and spoke of him as a dear boy, whom she knew so well, having met him at Lady Manners's. And I was disagreeable enough to smile, because he told me he had never seen her but once; and then I knew that when he called she had brought out that gray stocking. She likes young and aristocratic society. I suppose she was annoyed that he didn't come again. Still, she could hardly hold me responsible for that, and visit it upon me."

"Oh, please think aloud, aunt Serena!" said Rose. "You look much too wise. Farewell, peaceful Northbrooke! The world has seized my aunt. She is full of guile, and maketh plots and plans."

"I must invite Lieut. von Falkenstein here," said Miss Lennox placidly.

Gertrude looked surprised and amused. "That would be charming; but, Miss Lennox, people will think — you want him" —

"I do want him, or I should not ask him."

"Yes, — but, for Rose!"

"Oh, wheels within wheels!" aunt Serena replied with a patient smile. "If they think that, they will, no doubt, have leisure to — *un*think it."

"I want him very much," remarked Rose sedately. "I may take a walk with him some evening. And may Molly and Daisy come in and sit in the corner and look at him? Do you think such ecstasy would kill them? Do people who are young and strong ever die of joy?"

"Children, we shall all be late to dinner. Gertrude, will you come back and go in with us? And would you, perhaps, like to call me aunt Serena, my dear? It would not sound strange to us. I am aunt to all Northbrooke. Why, why, you are not going to cry now, after telling that brave, long story with dry eyes! Hush, child! Go and bathe your face quickly. Age has its privileges. As you see, I am a tyrant."

CHAPTER XVI.

"And a bird overhead sang, *Follow;*
And a bird to the right sang, *Here.*"
SWINBURNE.

IT was not long before our friends from Northbrooke began to take comfort and delight in the pleasant German city. Fair Wynburg presented itself to them under undeniably favorable auspices. The *pension*, it is true, was always there; but after their first inevitable moral plunge into its troubled depths, they were wise enough to float in whatever shallow, sunny pools they could discover, and avoid dangerous quicksands. Although the household seldom ceased its insidious surprises and attacks, aunt Serena was a genial philosopher, with whom it was impossible to quarrel. Each day she began anew with everybody. Her gentle optimism, closing its eyes to the disappointing experience of yesterday, awaited to-day only worthy sentiments and pleasing deportment from all mankind.

Even Rosamond, since the time her generous blood was stirred by the simple story of a girl's weary, lonely life, had met all annoyances at the table with imperturbable suavity. "If Gertrude," she thought, "has been strong and brave with never a friend or a joy to help her, unless I am a coward I

shall not allow these pygmies to hurt me." Accordingly she no longer changed color when the luckless victims of Mrs. Vivien's poisoned darts were slain by scores and dragged about at dinner. With urbane dignity, not unbecoming, and yet suggestive of a rosy child masquerading in its grandmother's bonnet, she once heard them covertly reproach her aunt for eccentric deportment and glaring independence. Mrs. Raymond herself could not have ignored the annoyance more loftily than did Rose on this occasion, or have interested herself more amiably in Molly and Daisy's French. This was a proud moment in her existence.

"It is war all the same," she would say to Gertrude, "but it is a more scientific kind. I was wasting my ammunition. Nothing routs them like blandness. Aunt Serena meets them with it, and so does Mrs. Raymond, each in her characteristic fashion; and both succeed. But oh, the fortifying that my poor spirit requires to imitate it!"

However, they liked their rooms and Frau Rudolph; and many beguiling paths led them away from whatever was uncongenial beneath her roof. Day by day they grew more intimate with the Raymonds, and from their hospitable house gradually advanced upon an agreeable and ever widening social plane, which Miss Lennox found novel and interesting, and the young girls entrancing.

Safely convoyed, the two sailed smoothly on, though meeting strange and unexpected crafts. With amused surprise they discovered that the terri-

ble Lady Manners, the anticipated Juggernaut, was a plain and unpretending little person, sufficiently good-natured and rather-dull. Mrs. Van. Rensalaer was, it must be admitted, more formidable. She was a woman who took the vast responsibilities of her ultra-fashionable life seriously, drawing lines of demarcation with unflinching rigor, and feeling upon her shoulders the solemn weight of the whole American colony of Wynburg. But even she was mortal. Her vulnerable point was her marriageable daughter. This fact once perceived, she ceased to inspire unmitigated awe.

The mighty magnates welcomed Miss Lennox with distinguished favor. Lady Manners, representing the conservative English, honestly liked her. Mrs. Van Rensalaer, august leader of the American cohorts, pronounced the Lennox name unimpeachable. Nothing more was essential to make aunt Serena a social success than the simple influence of her quiet, personal charm. The two girls declared that she received more attention than a belle in her first season.

Women admired her unreservedly, and, what is more exceptional, said so. They could not well be jealous of a person approaching sixty-five, however much admired she might be. Sedate, elderly men who found the fairest of the fair wearisome, preferring cards and their own cronies, had unlimited respect for this sensible, soft-voiced little woman, who knew something of politics, liked a rubber or two of whist, and was rather difficult to beat at chess.

Young men appreciated her kindness, her pleasant humor, and her not unflattering attention to their special hobbies. Girls and children adored her. Germans declared that there was something intrinsically German in her simplicity, her sentiment, her unworldliness. Frenchmen praised, as purely French, her delicate, high-bred air, her grace, and polished wit. The English said that Miss Lennox had "so few Yankee peculiarities, you know," she might really almost be mistaken for an English woman. The Americans proudly claimed her as their own, and exhibited her as the one typical American woman in Germany, — by an unexplained process the direct result of our free institutions and republican form of government. Even a chinamaniac, who had no interest in life outside of his collection, was overheard to remark, as he gazed upon her with the gloating eye of a connoisseur, that he had never seen any thing merely human so like a bit of rare and exquisite old porcelain.

Aunt Serena, in the mean time, moved on in her tranquil course, glad to find so much of home in the dreaded foreign land, accepting a discreet few of her many invitations, devising pleasures for the girls, contentedly watching her pretty Rose expand, and studying with deep interest the effects of a taste of joy upon Gertrude.

For Gertrude was at last happy. "They say we never realize present happiness," she would think, waking to another glad day, and smiling at herself in the glass for pure content. "Oh, let them live

as I lived, and then as I live now! Happy? I am gloriously, consciously happy. I exult in happiness. I breathe it in with deep, full breaths."

She was, it is needless to state, frequently called a sycophant. Her cringing and servile devotion to that rich old woman was freely commented upon. Mrs. Vivien advised her not to let herself be patronized. It did not look well in a girl of her spirit. But Gertrude smiled in blessed security. She had passed beyond them. She had soared to a higher sphere.

She had suffered too much from the carelessness or cruelty of the world to be able to turn suddenly towards it with outstretched arms. But she was relieved that it gave her no more blows, and was sufficiently young and generous to wish to forget how meanly it had treated her.

No one knew exactly how it was that people in general began to discover that Miss Peyton was an interesting girl. The sheep which had been running in one direction turned, and ran violently in the other. Aunt Serena made no defined effort to induce her acquaintances to admire Miss Peyton. She neither praised her, nor suggested that her young friend was in need of peculiar sympathy. She simply treated her as she treated Rosamond. Presently Gertrude became aware of smiling familiar nods mornings at the Conservatory, and with mildly cynical eyes observed that a thaw in her glacial surroundings had set in. It was a clear case of "Simon says." That mysterious despot had for

years commanded, "Thumbs down!" and she had been drooping under their baneful influence. Now the invisible Simon said, "Thumbs up!" and her spirits rose with the wagging little members. She did not deceive herself in regard to this wondrous change which had come as noiselessly as the dawn of day. No one perceived with more unerring insight the cumulative effect of the various remedies prescribed in this case for one of the worst ills of humanity.

Mrs. Raymond's carriage, containing Mrs. Raymond herself, a distinguished-looking, elderly lady, and a beautiful, bright young girl, waited a few times at the Conservatory for Miss Peyton. Once the elegant equipage had driven up empty; and quiet Gertrude in her brown ulster, music-roll in hand, her sensitive, satirical mouth smiling unutterable things, stepped lightly in past the obsequious footman. That day she found her circle of acquaintance surprisingly large. Alas, that inanimate objects like a wooden vehicle and brass buttons can thrill with strong emotion the immortal soul of man! Who could treat with indifference a person known to be with Miss Wellesley, the only young girl ever invited to charming Mrs. Raymond's small Wednesday dinners? Miss Peyton was also seen at one of Lady Manners's receptions. It hardly seemed an important event. She stood in a corner, and felt bored. But it was soon after that Kitty Van Rensalaer asked her if she would not like to try "something nice for four hands, — a Schumann

symphony perhaps." When Mr. Sydney Bruce began to pay Miss Peyton marked attention, it was hinted that she was connected with the Stuart Peytons of Baltimore, "exclusive old Southern family, you know." Presently she was pointed out to strangers as the beautiful Miss Peyton, the accomplished Miss Peyton, who, it was delicately whispered, had refused young Baron von Falkenstein. Yes, all the thumbs were unanimously up, Mrs. Vivien's highest of all.

Frau Rudolph held herself aloof, like Olympian Jove watching the petty struggles of mankind. But, quaffing her strong, black coffee, she soliloquized, shaking her sides in mighty mirth, —

"First time in my dear life I see nice, old, good, very still, little, one woman fight much great fools; and, oh, she do beat! It joys me that she do beat."

"Things amuse me so," Gertrude said one day. "I am the Wonderland Cat. Soon there will be nothing left of me but my grin." Then she added more gravely, "But it does not hurt me to accept all this from you, aunt Serena. First of all, you trusted me. That is my decoration of the legion of honor, and 'love may give a flower or a kingdom.'"

"You have only that intrepid and honest little person, 'the real me,' to thank. She has fairly gained whatever good has come to you."

But Gertrude shook her thoughtful head, and without extravagant demonstration worshipped her rescuers.

She worked as diligently as before, yet without anxiety as to her future course. Nothing definite had been decided: aunt Serena had merely remarked in her reliable way, "We will find something suitable for you and little Ruth. Be happy now, my child, with Rose;" and Gertrude at once felt safe as if established in some agreeable, honorable, and lucrative employment, with income enough to enable her to make a snug home for Ruthie, and pay the doctor's bills.

Rosamond, too, was busy. She had a sweet, light, soprano voice, in which Gertrude deigned to take interest. "It is a nice little parlor-voice," she would say approvingly. "If you work well, you'll be surprised to find how it will grow in six months." Rose plunged with energy into vocal exercises and German, to which she devoted her mornings. There were still many golden hours left.

One jocund day followed another. Harold Thornton's arrival towards the middle of November increased their pleasure, although he himself was at times singularly depressed and constrained. Aunt Serena was apt to ask him, with considerable solicitude, if he were sure he felt well, if he thought Germany was going to agree with him, if he were not homesick; when he would rally, and with forced gayety interest himself in plans for the general good.

It seemed to her scarcely natural for a gay boy to gain his point against all reason, come off to Wynburg with flying colors, live under the same roof

with the girl he professed to fondly love, have no heavier care than to see that every day of the pleasant fall-weather was utilized to the utmost, and still to appear absent-minded, odd, and moody. She knew that he had received no new rebuff from Rose; that he had, indeed, not yet molested her with the faintest suggestion of love-making; and no one was sufficiently devoted to her to render him uneasy or anxious. Bruce talked as much or more with Gertrude. Von Falkenstein, too, while manifesting no special preference for either, was naturally less formal and better acquainted with Miss Peyton. He had known her longer. Then, she spoke German; and his English, while highly attractive and original, was not yet all that he could desire. Aunt Serena pondered and waited.

Harold, as a matter of course, was Rose's cavalier. There was a widely diffused impression in Wynburg that they were, or were going to be, engaged to be married. He was her cousin, her companion, and familiar friend. He had hastened over the sea because he could not bear the separation. There could be no reasonable doubt. Mrs. Vivien seemed to know more on this subject than she was prepared to particularize. "I do so admire his youthful ardor," she would often say. "Then it is a so natural, so quite-to-be-expected and sure a thing. It reminds me of my own courtship, which was also a little idyl. Of course, being in the house with the young turtle-doves, I see more than any one else, — more indeed than I have any right to divulge — at present."

Meanwhile Rose was thankful Harold was no longer silly, and hoped he would soon tell her, in his old, frank way, what was preying on his mind. She was happy and affectionate, and gave him every opportunity to confide in her. Curiously enough, Harold was never so ill at ease as when *tête-à-tête* with Rose. He would subject her to long, inquiring looks, then turn away uneasily. He was repeatedly on the point of making some revelation, but would pause abruptly in utter confusion.

Ah, who may account for the waywardness and inconsistency of youth! Is there any thing in life so surprising, unless it be the waywardness and inconsistency of age? And why did Cupid play such a trick on this honest lad? Over land and sea, through mist and foam, he comes hurrying upon the wings of the wind to greet the lady of his love. He pictures the kind welcome that awaits him. He is confident his reward is not far off. He plans a happy surprise. He will walk unannounced into their little German home. He comes. With uncontrollable ardor he flies up the long stairway. He hears the sound of low chords, and a girl's voice crooning some sweet strain. He softly knocks, — opens the door, — enters. A figure all in fleecy white rises from behind the piano, and comes towards him. "Who is this angel?" he thinks. There is a rosy glow through the dimly lighted room, — it is owing to a red-paper lamp-shade; but how is the poor boy to know that? — The vision stands before him. It has fair hair. It looks etherial yet radiant.

It smiles gently at him. It opens its mouth and says in a cordial, human voice, —

"Oh, you must be Mr. Thornton! I will call them."

Alas for Harold's fine writing! Alas for his vows of fealty! Aunt Serena and Rose gave him the kindest of welcomes, but the meeting was not what his fond fancy had painted it. Something was wanting. Worst of all, the deficiency was, as he abjectly told himself, in his own black and perjured heart.

Why were not aunt Serena and Rose there to meet him? Why were they in their own rooms dressing to go to the theatre? Why was Gertrude ready first, sitting there singing low to herself with that bewitching, white, woolly thing thrown over her shoulders? He hung his head in shame, and bewailed his faithlessness. Rose was a dear; but this white, still maiden, they called Gertrude, was something quite different. Silent, self-contained, with a fleeting sad look in her dark blue eyes that made him sorry, with piquant sarcastic curves in the corners of her mouth that allured him. He was shy with them all that first evening. No, he had never seen any one like this Gertrude. But who would believe him, if he should say so? He could not indeed believe himself, he admitted in angry self-contempt.

When alone, he sulked persistently; but this did not prevent him from availing himself largely of the emoluments of his position as escort of two charm-

ing girls. In spite of his temporary disgust with the world, his unascetic spirit could not resist the temptations of a good horse, mirth and beauty, cool, crisp air, and excellent roads. They galloped by vineyard and orchard and grove, up the pleasant winding ascent which led from Wynburg to the airy heights surrounding it. They trotted through the stately park, whose noble vistas were now tinged with golden light where the sun shone on innumerable fallen russet leaves.

The park was a calm, peaceful spot. No faun or satyr, or any riotous sylvan shape, could ever have frequented its still glades. Only some imprisoned nymph might here, from the heart of a slender birch, softly lament her fate; and uneasy murmurs among the branches would respond, and a sighing in the reeds by a little, lonely pool; then silence everywhere, except for the plashing of many fountains. Even in spring, when the luxuriant foliage was pulsating with fresh life, the park was not without that gentle melancholy, apt to haunt low, level land, where there are broad, still spaces between great trees with heavy, drooping branches. The gay world on its race for wealth and power might course through it with its fashion and pleasures and pomps. The trees kept their secrets, and held themselves aloof. The place retained its own characteristics, and would, though trumpets should break its profound stillness, though laughing children should sport around its solemn trees, and wreathe their trunks with flowers.

Rose and Gertrude loved the breezy hills, but to aunt Serena the park was one of Wynburg's chief attractions. She walked there until the wind grew bleak in its winding ways, and the black trunks loomed up against new-fallen snow; but this was not until Christmas tidings were already in the air.

Sydney Bruce was often her companion. They had long, congenial talks together. The civil gardeners would stop raking up little piles of yellow leaves to touch their caps to the pretty, white-haired old lady on the arm of the grave and handsome young man. "She is a Russian," they said, which was merely because she was so well wrapped in fur. But the Russians were one of the few nations that had not as yet claimed her. Bruce never lost an opportunity to prove his devotion to his lovely lady of the market-place. Flowers for Miss Lennox, books for Miss Lennox, were continually arriving; and he himself was a frequent visitor in the cosey, too-many windowed room where Harold puzzled over the problem of how soon he could, with any semblance of dignity, acknowledge himself off with the old love, in order to be as speedily as possible on with the new; and blithe von Falkenstein improved his English accent, and, what Miss Lennox considered of more importance, his knowledge of the much misunderstood American "system."

Bruce was on excellent terms with them all, except Harold, who treated him with civil, but perceptible, reserve, regarding him, if the truth were known, as his evil genius. "He interfered before. He will

interfere now," thought the boy. "Why is he always in my way with his confounded handsome head? Is he insatiable?" Then he would blush to remember that he himself could not boast of that single-minded devotion to one object which would permit him to assume a lofty moral tone towards inconstancy. Harold entertained the widely diffused but erroneous impression that "girls tell each other every thing;" and if Gertrude knew all, what respect could she have for his easily transferable affections? His natural instinct was to confide in Rose as his trusty stanch comrade, but he could not sufficiently humble himself. We all at times contradict our ruling spirit. In his embarrassment, he turned even from Rose.

The little party at Frau Rudolph's was accustomed to see Mr. Bruce at any hour with a message from Mrs. Raymond. So willing a messenger was rarely found. They planned excursions with the Raymonds in every direction, and scoured the environs of Wynburg, which were rich in historical and romantic incident and natural beauty. Through the queer little irregular villages, perched on the hills and nestled in the dales of that pleasant land, resounded the gay clatter of their horses' hoofs; and every ruined castle and abbey for leagues around was seized and occupied by these happy marauders. Frequently the procession was not insignificant in numbers. The four young people on horseback; the Raymonds and Miss Lennox driving behind; Edith and Marjorie, with Elise and the hampers,

bringing up in the rear in a second carriage, in which might also be occasionally seen Molly's and Daisy's round, pleased eyes and flaxen braids. These over-much-mothered lassies were discovered to be good children, without — or in spite of — the constant companionship of their own mamma.

The telling of poetical old stories, the family atmosphere of the party, the bright presence of the little people whose informal treatment seemed to draw them all nearer together, favored Bruce's smooth and uneventful progress towards his aim. He was consumed with impatience, yet felt it was wise to wait. A man who is in a state of mind which induces him to say to himself, "It is a privilege to see her merely get up and sit down again, it is a joy to see her turn her lovely head on her gracious shoulders," was naturally not averse to watching Rose by the hour in the free and constant intercourse existing between the families.

He had had his share of experience with women; but he felt strangely insecure of his ground with this sweet, unconscious child. He studied her in every mood. He knew her as no one did, except aunt Serena. He loved her more tenderly every day; but he dared not force circumstances, for fear of utter failure if he risked too much. He had a dread of startling her, of rendering her less childlike and frank with him. Her way of coming freely to him with any trifling wish or need filled him with delight; but when he noticed her manner to Raymond was equally simple and kind, his spirits sank.

Evenings in Miss Lennox's *salon* he observed von Falkenstein with a degree of irritation he was forced to admit was incipient jealousy, until at length convinced of the young man's harmless good-nature, and absence of any intentions whatever as regarded Miss Wellesley, except to enjoy the passing moment, perfect his somewhat defective *th*, and form new theories of that vast, delightful, and puzzling subject, — American girls.

Harold's advent did not occasion him much alarm. The fact that it was Mrs. Vivien who had declared this fair stripling to be his cousin's accepted lover, seemed to Bruce reasonable ground for doubting the truth of the statement. Then, there was nothing whatever in Miss Lennox's or Rosamond's treatment of Thornton to verify the rumor. Bruce was sure that those eyes had never looked love into any man's.

This joyful conviction did not prevent him, however, from subjecting Harold, as well as all strange young men who presented their respectful homage to Miss Wellesley, to an inquisitorial scrutiny, of which they were happily unconscious. His well-established position as family friend and aunt Serena's sworn knight, gave him every opportunity to know whom Rose met and what influenced her. Provided he had no cause to fear a rival, he felt that he could bear to wait a very little longer; yet he anxiously scanned the Wynburg horizon every day.

He saw that she heartily liked the bright glimpses of society now and then permitted her, that she

enjoyed speaking her broken German to a little circle of officers, — always most indulgent and encouraging critics of the lingual efforts of a pretty girl, — that she liked to dance with them and jest with them, that she was pleased to meet people of different nations, and altogether amused at the novelty of her surroundings. But, with exultation, he saw that beneath her girlish dignity was the careless gayety of a child. "She is always Rose, — my wild-rose, — my heath-rose, — stainless and fresh, with the dews of the morning still clinging to her, with the woodland grace and the cool fragrance that make her a thing apart amid the forced growths of this stiff world-garden."

And Rose was growing used to Mr. Bruce. He seemed to be the best and wisest interpreter of her new life.

Across a room, whatever she might be doing, she would meet the smile in his eyes, which seemed to flash its way to her over the heads of the people. There was an indulgence and approval in it which made her feel very happy. She asked Gertrude if she had ever noticed how kindly Mr. Bruce's eyes could smile out of his grave, calm face, and if she thought people's eyes usually smiled when the face seemed to be in perfect repose. Gertrude soberly discussed with her this interesting facial phenomenon. Rose was also profoundly grateful to Mr. Bruce. He was most charming in his devotion to her aunt. He had stood shoulder to shoulder with them in the quiet victorious advance of Gertrude's

self-constituted guard of honor. Indeed, having noticed that any conspicuous attention to Miss Peyton would have the sure and delicious effect of sending Rose to him with a glow of gratitude in her face, — so nearly resembling tenderness that he could with difficulty maintain the reserve of bearing which he deemed temporarily expedient, — he became even more attentive to Gertrude than his benevolent desire to be of service to that charming young girl could justify. To whom, indeed, would he not have devoted himself, if rewarded by the mute, sweet gesture of Rosamond's clasped hands, the glad thankfulness of her beautiful eyes? He would have faced Medusa. But Gertrude belonged to no Gorgon sisterhood.

Four pairs of friendly eyes were following his movements with extreme interest. Of these, hers saw clearest; and she quietly awaited the sure and happy result. It seemed to Gertrude she could best serve Rosamond's interests by allowing herself to be used as a puppet. To Gertrude, also, her friend's unconsciousness was something sacred; and not one jesting allusion in regard to Mr. Bruce did she ever, after the manner of girls, make to Rose. She saw, with much amusement, that being with her gave Mr. Bruce the most admirable opportunity to look at Rosamond, and that he made the most of it.

One evening, at the house of a German friend, Bruce stood talking with Miss Peyton. At a little distance Rose was receiving very paternal attentions from her host, whose little pleasantries, she,

with her charming play of feature, was trying to interpret to Harold.

"Miss Wellesley looks very beautiful to-night," Bruce remarked carelessly.

"Yes," Miss Peyton said. "She is the most beautiful girl I ever saw, and the kindest," she added.

Bruce continued to look steadily at the group in the centre of the room. His cool glance was pleasantly critical, as if he were studying an excellent picture. After a slight pause he remarked deliberately, "One would not infer from Miss Wellesley's manner to Mr. Thornton that she is his *fiancée*."

"What manner do girls have when they are *fiancées?*" asked Gertrude, smiling.

"Not that. At least, I imagine she would not," he replied gravely. He was as self-contained as ever, but she knew a word might help him. Gertrude looked at him. She liked and admired him. She remembered the fable of the lion and the mouse. "I wonder if I dare," she thought, opening a photograph-album, and examining assiduously a moonlight view of the Grand Canal at Venice.

"She treats him as if he were a girl," she said softly, and with a little embarrassment. It seemed presumptuous in her to understand Mr. Bruce as well as she did. It was like instructing the Delphic oracle. "They are not engaged. They never will be, I think. It seems to me neither of them wish it. They are only like brother and sister," and then she stopped, appalled at her temerity.

"Thank you, Miss Peyton," Bruce said kindly. "You are very good to say that to me." She glanced up timidly. They exchanged a long look of good understanding. He was smiling at her frankly. "How shamelessly she flirts," commented Mrs. Vivien to a French gentleman. "Really, I blush sometimes for my country!"—"You have no occasion, madame," he responded with courteous irony, inspecting Gertrude through his single glass. "The young girl is charming."

Aunt Serena was inclined to believe that Mr. Bruce loved her niece. She had seen much that would seem to be indubitable proof of it. Yet at times she wavered. And if it were Gertrude, what then? she asked herself. "The weary dove would at last find rest. I will not be selfish; and yet I could gladly trust my Rose to those kind, strong arms."

Mr. Raymond thought that Bruce no doubt knew what he was about, and at all events was enjoying himself uncommonly well.

Mrs. Raymond was disappointed. She reluctantly admitted to her husband that it was, after all, Gertrude. She liked her. She thought her pretty and attractive, but she immeasurably preferred Rose. She had hoped it would be Rose. She had been sure it must be Rose. But why should Sydney, with the choice free before him, deliberately distinguish Gertrude by his attentions? Why should he talk more with her, walk more with her, if he did not prefer her?

That a man like her brother, with no reasonable obstacle in his path, should have sentimental scruples on account of a girl's youth, and a tender, protecting care of her happy freedom, did not enter her calculations.

"Sydney," said she one morning as he was about to take a new novel over to Miss Lennox, "does it seem to you that Miss Peyton is cleverer than Miss Wellesley?"

He apparently was occupied in weighing their intellects, for he did not immediately answer

"I think not," he finally said.

"And do you find Miss Peyton prettier?"

Again Bruce considered the matter.

"No," he said. "Upon the whole, I do not."

"And have you any reason to believe that Miss Peyton has a sweeter disposition?" she went on, elated with her success.

"They are both charming girls, Folly. Why do you catechise me?"

"Because, Sydney, I simply must. Have I once, in all these years, though my hair has almost turned gray with fright time and time again, ventured to warn you against a girl, to suggest another, to direct you in any way in the matrimonial labyrinth? Have I not abstained with heroic self-command from my natural *rôle* of match-making sister? And when I have seen you mooning about as you did, — yes, Sydney, I *will* speak now! — splendid as you are, you were mooning at that time, — did I lift my finger in the matter? Did I tell what I

knew? Did I interfere? Did I do any thing but await in agony the result, which, no thanks to you, my dear, was better than any one could have expected?"

Bruce laughed.

"Don't laugh, Sydney. Answer me."

"What you say is all quite true, but" —

"Then, listen to me now. Marry Rosamond Wellesley. I am not prejudiced against Miss Peyton. I like her. I am her friend. But why take the second best instead of the best? And Rose suits you better, Sydney. Any rational person would tell you so. What do you want of a girl with a past? After the honeymoon you would both sit and mope. I can see it perfectly. Gertrude is a beautiful, dignified girl; but what charm can she have for you compared with Rosamond? Let her have Harold Thornton. He's an excellent young man. Oh, every thing is going wrong, and all for the want of a little common sense!"

"But" —

"No: you must hear me this time. You are going to tell me you do not love Rosamond, and that you do love Gertrude; to which I say, nonsense. How many fancies have you had before in your life, if the truth were known? How many fancies does every man have? O Sydney, don't laugh! it is not like you to laugh so heartily when I feel this so much. If you would only trust me this once. You have a passing fancy for Gertrude, but Rosamond is the one whose sunny nature would make you

truly happy. Why need you be so blind? Why do you not perceive that the girl is the most exquisite being that you or I or anybody has ever seen? Have you no eyes for her beauty? for her wonderful, rich coloring? Why, Titian would have gone mad over her! Is it possible that you do not know she has great, deep, clear eyes, whose exact color I defy any one to find out, that look up at one as innocently as my Marjorie's? Has that no charm for a man like you? And in what does she fail, I should like to inquire. Do you not find her sympathetic? Does she not care for books and pictures? Has she not tact and wit and grace and quick appreciation?"

In vain Sydney interposed his "But Florence"—

"And she is good. How loving and good that dear girl is, I suppose no man can quite understand. And how gentle with all her spirit! Sydney, if I could influence you only this once! I tell you plainly, that, beside Henry and the children and yourself, there is no one in the world for whom I have so much affection as for this child. Not even for lovely old Miss Lennox. I will not be unkind if it must be Gertrude; but if it might be Rosamond, I should feel blessed. I have set my heart on this. Have I not been a good sister? Must you disappoint me in this, dearest Sydney?"

In his life Bruce had never known his sister to evince so much feeling. There were actually tears in her eyes. He was singularly touched. At first the humorous side of the situation had struck him

forcibly; but now he said gently, his own voice somewhat unsteady, —

"If it is not Rosamond, it will be no one; and, Florence, I will not deceive you. Your pleading, though I thank you for it, was not needed. It has always been Rosamond."

CHAPTER XVII.

"Here, by God's rood, is the one maid for me."

"She lifted up her eyes
And loved him. . . . . .
And all night long his face before her lived,
. . . . . .
Dark-splendid, speaking in the silence, full
Of noble things, and held her from her sleep."

TENNYSON.

UP on the beautiful wooded hills around Wynburg raged the wintry wind, chilling the patient peasant as he trudged from his distant hamlet down through the light snow to the Christmas market. Below, in the valley, nestled the sheltered, smiling city. From its very heart rose the gray church-tower. No slender, airy spire was this, drawing the soul upward to spiritual contemplation; but sturdy, bold, and blunt, its broad summit seemed a fitting place for the musicians to climb in the early morning, at busy noonday, again towards quiet eventide, and, according to the primitive custom, trumpet forth *Ein fester Burg*, or some other strong old choral of Martin Luther and his stalwart followers.

As the passing glance of a keen-eyed stranger may detect, in a human face, subtle lines unobserved by those who see it oftenest and love it best;

so the tower, and its valiant neighbor over the way, the massive old castle, spoke to aunt Serena and Rose with a rough eloquence, unheard perhaps by the careless crowd. Mediæval memories contrasted, yet mingled pleasantly, with the life of the eager multitude preparing their homes for the most welcome guest of the year. The tower and the castle seemed to put their hoary heads together, remembering brave Christmases that were; and the very oldest of the queer old houses near by reached up with their peaked gables, and leaned over to listen, knowing that the tales these grim heroes told were bolder and stronger than the tales of to-day.

The German Christmas had for our friends a rich and novel charm. There were resemblances to their home festivities, yet, also, many points of dissimilarity. Christmas at the Nest meant heavy snowdrifts round the cottage, huge open fires within, turkeys to all aunt Serena's old women, trimming the church with evergreen and flowers, glad, full services, and children's carols, a family dinner, — they with the Thorntons, or the Thorntons with them, — one or two familiar friends, and choice spirits beside, the tree in the evening, — and in the exchange of gifts the merry revelation of long cherished secrets, — mirth and feasting, peace and good-will, and good cheer. It was a dear and happy time.

But Christmas at Wynburg, while not dearer and sweeter, was more marvellous and fanciful. All the kobolds and mischievous sprites of German legen-

dary lore seemed to be let loose, working their merry will. The frugal, careful German would forget his habitual economy, toss prudence to the winds, buy lavishly, give recklessly, — not only to his own, but to his friends and their own, to his friend's friends and their own, to his man-servant, his maid-servant, and to the stranger within his gates.

Frau Rudolph brewed and baked, and filled her larder with cheerful punches and delectable sweetmeats. Milk and honey flowed all day long, and all day long a vigorous pounding and beating and stirring went on in the kitchen. Savory odors pervaded the corridors; and she, rosier and comelier than ever, was like a huge bubble of delight, so vast was her glee in the mysteries of her Christmas hospitality.

On the great joy-wave floated Rosamond and Gertrude, smiling at life. Everybody seemed happy and harmless. Mrs. Vivien became inadvertently sincere. Mrs. Lancaster forgot to bridle, and to censure less enlightened mammas. Mrs. Van Rensalaer was seen to smile. Through the gay, jostling crowd the young girls and aunt Serena were hurried along. The noisy Christmas market filled the streets with its booths and tables. Its common furniture, wheel-barrows, hobby-horses, and baby-carriages threatened to blockade the pavements. By chattering peasant crones, and wrinkled old men in red waistcoats and short breeches, stood elegant women, and stately officers in brilliant uniform. The shop-windows were full

of beautiful, dazzling things. Long rows of fir-trees lined the streets.

The children had entered upon their kingdom, and every one became as much of a child as possible in order to obtain entrance into that happy realm. Marjorie Raymond wore an air of deep and quiet bliss. Why should she be excited that all her dear people had come to town? Did she not understand them? Did they not understand her? They were a motley throng from many lands and nations; but this did not ruffle Marjorie's calm spirit: and, it must be confessed, great unanimity of sentiment and sympathy prevailed among them. She had no narrow prejudices. She was cosmopolitan, at home in all wonderlands where a fairy or a gnome would welcome her; and she knew how to reconcile discrepancies which would have confused a smaller mind. Now she welcomed them all to Wynburg. In her goodly company were only well-bred guests. There was no vaunting of national peculiarities. Santa Claus did not clash with *Knecht Ruprecht*, but courteously placed his swiftly flying reindeer at the other's disposal; and away they sprang over the astonished German roofs. *Frau Holle*, that wise arbiter, with her bundle of rods for naughty children, her untold sweets for good ones, far from frowning upon the open expectant mouths of little American hung-up stockings, and declaring them a modern innovation, accepted gallant old St. Nicholas's proffered arm, and made his rounds with him at midnight, lighten-

ing his labor by her amiable converse, and even helping fill the stockings with her own deft hands.

The universality of Marjorie's genius permitted Hans Andersen's tin soldiers to act as body-guard for the awakened Dornröschen and the happy prince on their wedding-tour; while the Ugly Duckling swam about with the Water Babies; and Blue Beard, little Red Riding Hood, Alice and the White Queen, Gulliver, and a few Liliputians were hospitably entertained at Aladdin's wonderful palace. They were all there. When, indeed, do they sally forth in such numbers as at the summons of Christmas bells?

Bruce did not laugh at the little girl's fancies, and she could always talk freely with him. He even understood how the three kings of the Orient, who, in gold-paper crowns and shabby white raiment, stole shyly about from house to house in the twilight, singing their feeble little song, and gladly gaining a few pennies, joined her other majestic folk in their triumphant procession; though she knew that Caspar was the baker's Hans, Melchior ran on errands, and that Balthazar bore upon his countenance indisputable signs of his profession of chimney-sweep.

Nor was uncle Cid shocked when he found that over her world hovered the fair Christ Child, blessing and loving all children.

Several days before Christmas, Edith and Marjorie had begged their uncle to help them select a present for mamma. It was an important moment

when the three sallied forth towards evening, each little girl with the savings of months in her purse. In the large, crowded, brilliant shop they met Gertrude and Rosamond, whom the children at once urgently solicited to aid in the weighty decision.

Edith knew how much she had to spend, and priced small and useful objects with a *savoir faire* which amused the spectators. Marjorie, unmoved by the crowd and the glitter, stood with her hand in Rosamond's, turning her slow, calm gaze about.

Edith, with praiseworthy despatch, bought a penrest for papa, a postage-stamp box for mamma, and had some pennies left. Her purchases were both pretty and practical. If there were time, she proposed having a monogram cut on the box.

Marjorie said quietly, —

"I don't see any thing pretty enough for mamma here."

Edith expostulated, but uncle Cid asked, —

"Shall we go somewhere else, Marjorie?"

When suddenly the child's eyes began to dilate. "I would like that swan!" she exclaimed. In the centre of the window, among fanciful gas-jets and glittering glass and attractive objects of every description, was a large and finely-cut ivory swan. Exquisite white water-lilies rested on gently undulating ivory waves, and the stately bird's plumage was delicate and feathery as if nature had carved it. It had been placed there more as an ornament or advertisement of fine work in ivory than with any expectation of selling it, and was a gift fit for a princess.

The saleswoman looked incredulous. The young girls were rather at a loss to know what to advise in this unexpected dilemma, especially as Marjorie did not take her eyes off the swan. Edith had assumed a magisterial manner, and was about to enlighten the poor little girl; when Bruce hushed her, and said, with an indulgent smile, —

"Why do you want the swan, Marjorie?"

"It is tall and beautiful, like my pretty mamma," the child replied without hesitation. "It saved *Brüderchen und Schwesterchen*. Oberon has one. Mamma will look at it, and think of lovely Oberon. Then, there is that sad fairy prince, — but I do not know him," — she said doubtfully, — "who looks like you, uncle Cid, — he has one."

Bruce smiled still more indulgently. "She means Lohengrin," said Gertrude with a little laugh. "We have it to-morrow, by the way. Mr. Bruce, you cannot resist that flattery, I am sure."

"I don't intend to try," said he in a low tone. "My sister says I spoil her, but the child seems angelic to me."

Still clinging to Rosamond, Marjorie said to the saleswoman, —

"Please give me the great white swan," confidently holding out her little hoard. Bruce, over the child's head, gave an acquiescent nod.

"But, Marjorie," said Edith, "what is it good for? It is too large for a paper-weight, and it doesn't hold flowers."

The sisters looked at each other gently, but with,

perhaps, as much sympathetic comprehension, the one of the other, as a sky-lark and a sparrow might be supposed to feel.

"It is pretty, like mamma," said the little one at length.

"You have nothing at all for papa," Edith remonstrated.

"Papa knows I love him," replied Marjorie in blissful security, "and mamma will allow him to look at the swan."

Mr. Bruce ordered the swan sent home. It was very unwise in him. It did not inculcate habits of economy and exactness in his little niece. But what could one expect of a bachelor? And then, there were other eyes than Marjorie's, that begged and thanked him. Marjorie's, in fact, did not thank him. The contented little maid labored under the impression that she had bought and paid for the wondrous bird.

The following evening Rosamond heard "Lohengrin" for the first time, and saw the mystic knight of the swan, whom Marjorie called the sad fairy prince. Aunt Serena smiled to find herself often in the Wynburg theatre, well pleased, and decidedly at home. "Why," she thought, "can we not have the help of beautiful music and the influence of master-minds brought within the reach of moderate means, and at so early an hour that neither the aged and delicate, nor the very young, need hesitate to enjoy them?" She preferred, indeed, that Rosamond should study life, presented to her gaze in this way, at the

sensible hour of seven or even half-past six, than that she should make too many personal investigations and experiments in a crowded ball-room. So the congenial party enjoyed most charming evenings in the pleasant, and by no means oppressively elegant, little theatre, where people came early in walking-dress, and went home temperately at half-past nine; and the same faces, evening after evening, grew as familiar as the drop-curtain; and the homelike atmosphere made one forget that that nervous little man opposite was the Marquis of Carabas, and that the plainly-dressed, pretty young girls at the right, with cheeks like the sunny side of a peach, and a delightfully fresh and wholesome air, were princesses, belonging to what Americans grandiloquently term the "effete aristocracy of the old world."

Aunt Serena was an excellent American; but there was much that puzzled her in the prosperous, well-governed land in which she was sojourning. What she observed did not always seem to assimilate with the uncontradicted eloquence of a Fourth-of-July oration. "Why do we think we are the only ones? We are very far off," she mused this evening. "Perhaps if we were nearer," — when the orchestra, with the thrilling, expectant strains of the overture to Lohengrin, interrupted her gentle meditations.

The whole fashionable world of Wynburg was there that night, and the house wore a holiday air. The singers were in excellent voice, the audience

was in a sympathetic and approving humor, the representation promised to be a brilliant one. But Rosamond had no eyes for the *loges*, where pretty women and diamonds and uniforms and decorations might well have attracted a passing glance of pleasure from the little maid of the remote, still Nest. She was unaware, though Bruce was not, of the continued levelling of glasses towards the Raymond *loge*, where, behind Mrs. Raymond, always herself a charming figure, and the lovely old lady whom people liked to see, sat a beautiful young girl in white, her eager eyes fixed on Elsa of Brabant.

From the moment the innocent Elsa, with her soft, clinging grace and exquisite womanliness, stood before her dark accuser and the people, and implored Heaven to send to her rescue the fair knight of her dreams, Rose lived with her through every phase of the beautiful story.

Bruce watched on her face, as in a deep, clear lake, the reflection of all that passed. There was a dangerous sweetness in thus gazing into her transparent soul. She was sitting so near him, he could feel every breath she drew. Sometimes she would hold it, in suspense and sympathy. Her rich, heavy hair was put back simply from broad, level brows. It waved slightly at the temples; and the right side did not grow quite like the left, as he had noticed many times. Her eyes, by day a brilliant light-brown, were dark and luminous with excitement. Her close white dress, of some heavy material, was severely plain. She might be a priestess of Arte-

mis, he thought. But on her face was an emotion scarcely requisite in the worship of the cold goddess. The vast problems, the passion and ecstasies and mysticism of the music, and the theme, were swaying the impressionable, inexperienced girl beyond all control.

He could almost see her pure spirit soaring towards the heights of Monsalvat, as the ineffable strain of the Holy Grail passed, returned, and passed again; while she clasped her hands tightly together as the rich, swelling, emotional harmonies, with their conflict of human pain and human sweetness, swept her maiden soul along in their mighty movement.

Between the acts she did not talk much. Bruce spoke to her now and then, gently adapting himself to her mood. She would answer him sweetly, without effort, sometimes hardly looking at him. It was almost as if he were in harmony with her thoughts. He was convinced that at least his presence created no dissonance. He was filled with exultation. His heart beat fast, and an imperious instinct bade him claim his own. "I have waited too long. By the paltry measurement of men, it is a few brief weeks; but my soul has been waiting for her through the ages." He raised his opera-glass, and quietly studied the opposite gallery. His sister spoke: he listened with attention. Aunt Serena turned, and saw that Rosamond was no longer in Wynburg, but on the broad plains of the Scheldt. "My dear and happy Rose," she thought; and her smile was full of

such tender sweetness, as she replied to Mrs. Raymond's light remark, that a certain very august but kindly and human personage was prompted to say to his first gentleman-in-waiting, "Who is that white-haired old lady?" After which, aunt Serena immediately, and quite unconscious of her own agility, sprang up several rounds of the Wynburg social ladder.

The chatter and movement went on in the adjacent *loges*. There were charming women and distinguished men there. What was it that made this simple little girl, with her large eyes, seem to have nothing in common with them all? Why were they two alone in the crowded, brilliant theatre? Gentle Elsa stands on her balcony at night, —white-robed, golden-haired, gracious, and pitiful, — the incarnation of womanliness, her pure heart throbbing with innocent rapture, — rosy auroras dawning in infinite love-horizons. Motionless by his side, all in vestal white, sat this fair child-woman, who had won his strong love. The wonderful music was passionately beating out its subtle soul-problems. Opposite him were some avowed beauties, their faces as thoroughly prepared for inspection as if the world were a perpetual photographer, always adjusting his camera. What did their lovely masks lack? What this calm, saintly, silvery-haired being had never lost. What his sister — dear woman — had found when she found Rose. What Rose herself, with her rich warmth, her strong enthusiasm, her magnificent impulse, had most of all. Was it not a glory in this living world to be merely

so alive as she? Yet often, as he looked at her, he would feel as he did when Marjorie's dear, dreamy eyes rested upon his, with their fond faith in unrealities. Pathos swiftly followed delight.

On the stage treacherous Ortrud is disputing Elsa's right of precedence, and before the very portals of the great Minster of Antwerp rages a fierce tumult.

Rosamond turned to Sydney with, —

"Why should she care for the people? She has him."

Somewhat as he would explain a hidden meaning to Marjorie, Bruce replied, —

"It is Ortrud's wicked plot to instil doubts in Elsa's mind. She loves Lohengrin, but he withholds his past. The mystery haunts her."

Rose looked at him gravely.

"What has the past to do with it? It is he that she loves, and not his past."

"Women think it of importance, — sometimes," answered Bruce with a faint smile.

"I do not understand," she said slowly, as the curtain was rising on the last act. "With him near, how can she listen to them? It would be as if there were no one else on earth;" and her low, sweet words were more to herself than to him.

An impetuous, ardent answer sprang to his lips. Already she was far away from him, her entranced gaze watching every movement of the lovers, the joyous bridal chorus pealing in her ears.

But when the loving, gracious woman, transformed

by suspicion, in a frenzy of jealous doubt, rashly asks the fatal question, Rosamond leaned forward with a long, shuddering breath.

"Oh, she must not!" she exclaimed softly. "She promised." And still more softly, as if to her own heart, "I would not ask him. Oh, I would not!" she murmured.

All around, it was dim and hushed. The theatre-lights were turned down. She was still leaning forward, white, and very fair and sweet, so near him that her light breath touched his cheek. He could have taken her in his arms almost without moving. He could have kissed that queer little irregular line of hair on her left temple, and scarcely bent his head. He had not meant to speak with the great world near. But his reticence and his careful plans vanished. He forgot even that he had no rights, no defined place with her; and, as if they were long-plighted lovers, who had together discussed all sweet old questions of human love and faith, he said, with a deep tenderness she had never heard from any man, —

"Would you not — dear?"

One imperceptible instant, as if she had not heard aright, her large, startled eyes met his strong, ardent gaze, then drooped; and in her heart was a happy tumult. The music surged in great waves around her, rising and falling in a new and wonderful rhythm. With shy, sweet eyelids down she still saw the bridal-chamber: but, by a strange metamorphosis, it was not Elsa in the oriel-window, but only

little Rose; and by her side was not Lohengrin, but another, also a stately man with grave eyes; and he, this one, was asking for her faith in low words that she heard clearer than the blare of the trumpets and the prolonged rolling of the drums. This was what it all meant, then. Could she be true to him? Could she have faith in him, — for him against the world? She raised her eyes. His were still upon her. From his fine, expressive, emphatic face, the calm indulgence she had known had vanished. She saw only unspeakable entreaty. She was a child still; and her head was filled with innocent, romantic fancies. The story on the stage was approaching its end. The music was heavy and weird with doom, wild with mystery. Looking him full in the face she smiled a slow, rapt smile, and thus all silently pledged her faith. It was, indeed, her faith rather than her love that she first promised him in that long, loyal look. Then, feeling the strong love in his eyes, she turned away with a great, sweet shyness creeping into her heart.

A few brief moments, and their world was transformed. It was only words such as one hears every day, a man's earnest look, a girl's impassioned, trustful smile; but already they two were wandering in Elysian fields.

The theatre-lights are still dim. Elsa of Brabant lies fainting in the arms of her women. She has lost her glorious knight. The weak, sweet woman could not trust unquestioning, though he stood before her like a fair, strong god. The last strains of music

cease. The curtain falls. One love-story is at an end; another has begun. The people are rising to go. Dear aunt Serena says placidly, as they enter the cloak-room, "How beautiful it has been!" and scans her child's illumined face. Mrs. Raymond remarks kindly, "Miss Wellesley is still seeing wonders. Is it a vision of the knights of the San Grail? I must confess, Wagner is too mystical for me. He works one up, and never calms one down again. He leaves one quivering with emotion, until contact with the world is like a sharp blow in the face. Now, he can't expect anybody to live up to him, can he? Perhaps you others do; but I am not on your heights, you know. Mr. Raymond and I prefer a comfortable and less exposed location." She smilingly adjusted her opera-cloak. "It is not as sublime; but then, one does not get blown off one's feet." At which remark her husband's unquestionably firm and well-poised figure presents itself.

He takes his wife and aunt Serena down. Bruce draws Rose's hand through his arm, and they follow through the crowded corridors. There is no opportunity for any word which the world may not hear. Rose walks sedately by his side, and never glances once at him. But in her eyes is a tender light, and her happy young mouth trembles. She hardly knows herself what great and wonderful thing it is that has happened. The music and the people and the lights and two living Elsas and two Lohengrins are mingling in strange confusion in the young girl's thoughts.

Down the stairs she goes, as in a dream. She has walked with Mr. Bruce, in those careless days, — a lifetime ago, — before she stood in the oriel-window, and promised him her faith. But no: that was the other maiden; and she broke her faith; and her lover was floating away over broad waters. Here is hers, by her side, holding her close on his arm, his beautiful head bending towards her, saying something calmly about "to-morrow." And now the chill air strikes her flushed cheeks, and the cold, bright stars are shining down on the happy Christmas weather. There is a noise and bustle, a rolling of wheels on the crisp snow, a stamping of impatient hoofs, kind good-nights exchanged. He puts her in the carriage with aunt Serena, and stands an instant, the light shining on his uncovered head. Yes, she had promised him something, — promised it for all her life.

Her hand crept into aunt Serena's, but she said nothing. They drove home in silence. "Dearest child, my good little Rose," murmured aunt Serena, with her good-night kiss. "Dear little fairy godmother," returned the girl softly; and went away alone, to see one face, to hear one voice, —

"Would you not — dear?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Here's happiness to all, abroad and at home.
Wassail! wassail!
Here's happiness to all, for Christmas is come."

"I TOLD Mr. Bruce," remarked aunt Serena, rolling a large doll in tissue paper, preparatory to laying her in a box, and finding some difficulty in the disposition of her feet, "that we should be too busy this morning with parcels and strings to entertain visitors. Was that right, children?"

"Why ask us, aunt Serena?" said Gertrude brightly. "He comes to see you. I never knew any thing more apparent. All the American belles in Wynburg are jealous of you for your deliberate appropriation of their most desirable cavalier."

"He said he wished to see me to-day, at all events," answered aunt Serena quietly. She did not look at Rose. Blessed are the women who are not addicted to giving significant glances!

"He is devoted to you. He is your slave," Gertrude remarked cordially. "May I have a bit of this red ribbon to tie up Molly's music-case? Poor Molly! I wish they wouldn't make her study music. She's the least musical person I ever saw, — except Daisy."

Harold gave an abrupt, grim laugh. He was feel-

ing very uncomfortable. Life was not to him all that it might be this Christmas Eve. It was immediately after breakfast; and the three ladies were busily making parcels of all sizes and shapes, neatly wrapped in white paper, and tied with bright ribbons. He stood moody and silent in the deep window. Lieut. von Falkenstein rode out of the court, and glanced up with a friendly greeting. He looked gallant and dauntless as young Lochinvar. "Happy man!" groaned Harold. "He announces that he is engaged to his cousin Olga, which saves his honor; and then he makes desperate love to every girl he meets. I wish I were a German officer. They seem to know how to reconcile duty and inclination better than most of us."

"There's von Falkenstein," he said aloud.

"I do like him," Gertrude remarked, searching for the scissors. "He is so light-hearted."

"Do you consider it a virtue to be light-hearted?" asked Harold in a melancholy voice.

"Yes," said Gertrude gravely.

They all laughed. Curiously enough, Harold at once grew cheerful. Von Falkenstein himself could not have been a more blithe and brisk companion.

Rosamond seemed to be too busy to talk much. She made the neatest little parcels, as if her life depended on having them quite even, and laid them, labelled, on the table. It was quiet Gertrude, this morning, who was in high spirits.

"Why do you wrap up all those things?" asked Harold.

"For the pleasure it gives to unwrap them," said Gertrude. "Is there no charm in mystery? Why do novelists tangle a plot, except to ravel it?"

"I abhor tangled plots. I like a story to be clear and healthy, well understood from first to last, and sure as the flight of an arrow. It is no pleasure to me to see a man in a disagreeably involved position, even in a book." He spoke with much feeling.

"You like him to be monarch of all he surveys? But that is not good for men, Mr. Thornton," said the girl with a charming smile. How much or how little Gertrude understood, neither Harold nor any one else ever knew. But girls who must look the rough world in the face from the time they are twelve years old, girls who lay down their dolls to take up grief and pain, are apt to have an extra sense in each intuitive finger-tip.

"I am very old-fashioned, and not intellectual; but the heroes I like least in modern books," said aunt Serena, struggling with a large toy for Percy Raymond, which was wanting in symmetry and abounding in springs, "are those who sit flat on the stones on a beach, in the dark night, before a 'simple' sea, and, observing that their hearts beat, stolidly remark, 'I am in love.' It does not seem to me that love is a hypochondriac, painfully analyzing his symptoms."

"They measure love with the fever-thermometer nowadays," remarked Gertrude dryly.

"Every one does not," Rosamond said softly.

Her thoughts were with Elsa of Brabant. "They did not give her time, poor Elsa!" she said to herself pityingly, as she shaped the corners of her packages with a business-like air. "They did not give her time. She had promised him. She would never, never have done it, if they had given her time. I will remember that."

"No, every one does not," repeated Harold sturdily, with a bold, clear glance at Gertrude. He was like a young Norseman, with his yellow hair and strong blue eyes. The Northern sunshine was in his smile. Gertrude cared for sunshine, she had had so little. "Every man does not dissect his lady-love, and declare himself to her separate sections. Every one does not prefer types to women, and qualitative analyses to emotions. There is still room in the world for us, thank Heaven."

"You mean the writer whose well-bred people always look at the carpet, and say, 'Ah?' and whose ill-bred people look everywhere, and say, 'Well!' do you not?" asked Gertrude, smiling. "But we must not devote our attention to unimportant things. We have not too much time, or enough tissue-paper. Who can bring some quickest?"

Harold disappeared.

"How did Mrs. Raymond ever ask Molly and Daisy without Mrs. Lancaster, and give no offence?" asked Gertrude. "Mrs. Lancaster is highly pleased. But only last year she was exceedingly irate when some one wished to separate her from them. 'Christmas,' she remarked, 'is the appropriate time to cul-

tivate the sentiment of family unity. Molly and Daisy remain with their mamma.' It is bad in me to laugh at her," she added good-naturedly, "for she is really devoted to her girls. But sometimes she is deliciously sententious."

"Mrs. Raymond did it as she does every thing, — with honesty and grace. She said she was inviting no older people, except very intimate friends; but, if Molly and Daisy would enjoy seeing the tree, she should be charmed to have them come. I ventured to add that I would take care of them, and bring them safely home; and Mrs. Lancaster accepted, with, I think, sufficient security of mind." Aunt Serena smiled slightly.

"And to-morrow we are to cultivate family unity here. Frau Rudolph is inimitable, when once a year she regally receives us as guests. How beautiful it all is! Rose, you have told me nothing about Lohengrin. Was Elsa not perfect? I think, when Nature made Wagner, she had already designed Fräulein Röder to play his Elsa and Elizabeth. Is she not pure grace and pure graciousness?"

"Elsa was lovely," said Rose quietly. "It is a pity she asked him his name."

"Women always ask in stories. We invariably, at a critical moment, do the thing we solemnly vowed not to do. We either tell all we know, or frantically insist upon knowing all that some one else knows. There are moments when I despise — us! Do you think there is any fatal compulsion about it, aunt Serena? Do you believe we must be small and mean?"

"If we hadn't the tendency, I presume we should not serve as examples in so many great tragedies," Miss Lennox admitted with much cheerfulness. "But I think you, at least, need not reproach yourself, Gertrude. I cannot imagine you in any position in which you would divulge a word more than you ought. You could be as silent as fate."

"But I am a cold, gray girl. I am not lovable, you know," said Gertrude, laughing. "It is the beautiful, warm, soft, enchanting women, who love and who are loved, that do all the harm, — like Rose," she added mischievously.

Rose stopped short in her work. With an earnestness surprising to the others, merely jesting in the midst of their tying of knots and writing of inscriptions on Christmas cards, she said, —

"Do you really think I am like that? But I would never have asked Lohengrin, never." Her voice was low and firm.

"We always think we would not, and then we invariably do," Gertrude retorted gayly.

Rose looked seriously at her.

"It does not seem to me it would be impossible to be faithful," she said quietly, and went on with her work. She saw a shining knight, who bent his lofty head to gaze at her with imperious yet pleading eyes. No: life itself would be worthless, if she could not always bravely meet those eyes, if ever they must look at her with pity, reproach, and forgiveness, and pain and parting, in their tender depths.

Ah! how would they look at her this evening?

Last night was already so far away. Aunt Serena appeared quite as usual, and very busy. There was dear Gertrude, in her brown walking-dress, looking as unconcerned as if nothing had happened. No one seemed to know. No one seemed to read in her face that something beautiful had come, that she could never be the same again. It was very strange. How had she dared to smile so at him? Had she spoken? Had she said, "I will be true to you as long as I live. I will never doubt you. I will never forsake you"? Or was it the music in throbbing cadences that said it all? Or was it quite unspoken, yet written for all time on each soul? She smiled softly. She was very happy.

Mrs. Vivien came brightly in.

"Dear Miss Lennox, may I ask a favor of you? Oh, don't stop work for me, young ladies. What a little mountain of packages you have there, and how cheerful you all look!"

"What can I do for you, Mrs. Vivien?" aunt Serena asked politely.

"It is only to let my little gifts for Edith and Marjorie go over with yours."

"That I can do without the least trouble."

"You are so very kind! How exhilarating this pleasant Christmas work is! Miss Peyton, you must enjoy it particularly."

"Yes, I do," Gertrude answered, not without bluntness.

"I enjoy it most of all, I think," said Rose with great tranquillity.

"Ah, life is indeed a lovely garden for you, Miss Wellesley! But let me advise you: pluck no brilliant poison-flowers. Be content with heart's-ease and forget-me-not. They suit your youth."

Rose looked bewildered. Gertrude smiled.

Aunt Serena said, in a matter-of-fact tone, —

"I have not yet seen a poisonous flower in Germany. In Northbrooke we have the wakerobin and the mercury-vine."

"Oh! I refer to a still deadlier blossom. It attracts, but it kills. It has proved fatal to many."

"Indeed!" remarked aunt Serena, with polite but remote interest.

Gertrude's keen eyes watched Mrs. Vivien closely. "Eyelids down! She means mischief!" Rosamond's face wore a questioning smile. The flowery warning amused her.

"I saw you at the opera last night," the little lady continued. "How could poor Mr. Thornton let you leave him? And in such fascinating society too! My cousin, who knows Mr. Bruce intimately, — most intimately indeed, — says he was everywhere, in old times, called the 'fascinating Mr. Bruce.' That was when they were — but I must not tell their little secrets. Oh, no, not I!" and she laughed gayly.

Rose surveyed her with a certain cold disgust. She began rolling up a long piece of narrow scarlet ribbon. She took care to keep it smooth.

"I cannot imagine that adjective applied to him," aunt Serena said pleasantly. "He might be

called an earnest man, a strong man, an interesting man; but what women usually mean when they say a fascinating man, — hardly."

"But it was when he was younger," Mrs. Vivien said with effusion; "when he was quite different, you know, and having his various delicate experiences. He has had enough, I assure you. Then, don't you find his very reserve and quiet extremely attractive? Don't you, now, Miss Wellesley?" turning suddenly to the girl who stood there, her heart helplessly protesting against the profanation of its temple. How dared this woman, with her loud tread, and rude, unfeeling touch, enter that white, still place, where she herself scarcely dared raise her eyes? But Rose came of a gallant race. Surprised, she was not disconcerted.

"Yes, very," she said coolly, her large, fearless eyes on Mrs. Vivien, her hands winding away mechanically.

"Bravo, *Röslein!*" thought Gertrude.

Aunt Serena smiled. "My brave Rose. How well she did it! And to-day, when her young heart is fairly bewildered with life's new, wonderful meaning!"

"Mrs. Vivien," she said, "we all like Mr. Bruce. We merely have a slight prejudice against the phrase 'fascinating man.'"

"A fascinating man is simply an odious man," Gertrude remarked with emphasis.

"Dear, dear!" Mrs. Vivien exclaimed, with a light laugh. "I had no idea you would have any

special reason here to fight Mr. Bruce's battles. Had I imagined that, I would never have called him fascinating, or alluded to his youthful escapades."

"Who rashly talks of battles on blessed Christmas Eve?" said Rose amicably. "Mrs. Vivien, did aunt Serena show you this interesting frog? I will wind him up for you. His hop is as spirited and independent as if life instead of works instigated it. It is for little Percy."

"How she guards him! How she loves him!" and a contented smile rounded Gertrude's thin lips. She looked up, and saw that aunt Serena read and shared her thought.

Mrs. Vivien was vivaciously charmed with the frog. "Another time," she resolved. "There is more in it than I imagined. I must write her at once."

She rose to go, with gentle words of endearment and approval. "Can I not assist you? No? You have really completed all your arrangements? And you go this evening too, Miss Lennox? What unflinching energy you have! Always out evenings, always going about, always eager for amusement. If I had the right, dear Miss Lennox, I should fairly keep you at home by force, now and then. Are you really quite as well after so much dissipation? Are you sure it is perfectly judicious? But do pardon me. It is only my real interest in you that speaks. Thanks again for your kindness about my little packages. I will bring them in later. So very good

of you. Am delighted that you can go, Miss Peyton. It will be so pleasant and novel for you."

Eloquent silence followed her exit.

Gertrude broke it.

"Now, why," said she meditatively, "why was this? I ask in peace and good-will to all women, aunt Serena. Do not be alarmed: I am not going to indulge in animadversions."

"Which are never your habit, my dear."

"And to-day I simply cannot. I would like to inquire, — merely as a psychological question, you know, — why we are all arraigned at once? Even you, — you giddy, frivolous, dissipated person!"

"I think she is disappointed," aunt Serena said kindly, and with perceptible hesitation. "She would like to go to Mrs. Raymond's to-night. At least, it seems so."

"Disappointed!" exclaimed Rose. "O Gertrude, aunt Serena's gentle 'disappointed' covers the sins of the whole world!"

That evening at five they drove to Mrs. Raymond's. They were very merry, which may have been owing to the exhilarating air and brilliantly-lighted, crowded streets. Then, Molly and Daisy, crowded into the carriage, and behaving with extreme propriety, according to their mamma's parting injunction, seemed to induce inexplicable mirth. People rarely spoke of Molly and Daisy without a smile. Perhaps it was their smooth, round heads. Perhaps it was their flaxen *queues*. Perhaps it was their mother. Rose laughed with the others. She

even said one or two very amusing things. All the time she thought, "How will he meet me? how will he greet me?"

He met her quietly in the bright room where the happy children were and Mr. Raymond. Mrs. Raymond was not there. She was putting last touches on the largest and most wonderful fir-tree which ever grew stately and strong in aromatic shades of the deep green-wood, with the song of birds in its branches and the free blue sky above, to tower up bravely in its last days before breathless little children, — a vision of loveliness and glory, a dear memory for all their lives.

Behind closed doors, Mrs. Raymond was rapidly saying, —

"Now, if it should not turn, Elise? If it should tip? The tree is very heavy. Hang that largest angel straighter; and the 'Star of Bethlehem' on the very top looks crooked. Wait. This branch needs more snow, and that one some frost. I must say the Christmas roses are a success. So much vivid scarlet and dead white are always effective. And the gold cherubs make the best taper-holders I have ever used. Remember that, Elise, for next year. If the music-box will only go! It is so unreliable, and has such an unpleasant way of giving that disheartening groan, and stopping short at

'Be it ever so *hum* —'"

"I think it will go, madame; and the tree is perfectly firm. If the music stops, the ladies and gen-

tlemen will think madame desired it to stop at that moment."

Mrs. Raymond laughed. "Sure enough, Elise. So they will. What a comfort! See that all the packages for Miss Lennox's party are together at the left. We are ready now, I think, to light the tapers."

This while her guests were entering the *salon.* Rosamond slipped a little behind the others. She saw Bruce wish aunt Serena a "Merry Christmas," and kiss her hand. How pretty she looked in her old point-lace and with the faint color in her cheeks. And white Gertrude came next. She was lovely too, her fair hair almost with a silver sheen on it, fairer than usual in contrast with the deep wine-red of her dress. Harold was looking at her hair. Bruce, too, glanced at her kindly, and said something in his courteous way. Had she, Rose Wellesley, really dared to — But now he was coming to her. Yes, it was the same face. The same clear, strong, beautiful face that had shone out in the dimness, and owned her, while the San Grail was passing in the mystic music, and pure, high heavens were opening. He merely drew her arm in his, and took her across the room to see his sister's new Hermes. Marjorie's little hand crept into hers on the other side. She stooped to kiss the child, glad of her presence. He was kind to act as if nothing had happened, — except, as he drew her hand within his arm, it was as if a legion of guardian angels were compassing her round about. They stood

before the Hermes. He looked down upon the lovers with his mild, thoughtful, pitying smile.

"He has been recently excavated," Bruce explained. "Think of this pure Greek perfection being buried so long;" and he passed his hand lovingly over the veins in the slender throat, and the strong, young, athletic breast of the fair, white god.

"What does he say to us?" asked Rose softly.

"He says — to us" — and Bruce lingered on the little word as if it were pleasant to him — "Why, then, are ye here? What will ye become? Only to live and suffer, to love and die, — poor mortals?"

"But it is enough," said the young girl, her grave, sweet eyes on the god's perfect face. Taking some violets from her girdle, she laid them before him on his ebony pedestal.

"Is he a rogue?" asked Marjorie's clear tones. "Does he steal and cheat? Papa says he is a splendid rascal, but I love him because he is so beautiful. Uncle Cid, please lift me up to kiss him."

"He is what Fate made him, as we all are," Bruce replied, with a smile for Marjorie's anxious eyes. "But I always like to think of him as 'the swift messenger between Zeus and all life wherein there breathes a soul.' See, there are the broken fingers of the infant Bacchus on his shoulder. It is the child whom he regards with his godlike, pitying smile."

"Why does the white god pity?" asked little

Marjorie. "The prince in 'Dornröschen' does not pity."

"The prince in 'Dornröschen' thinks only of the princess and himself. The white god is thinking of all souls," Rose ventured to explain.

"Oh," said Marjorie softly. Her child-eyes had assumed that alarming look of omniscience which startles us now and then in the very young.

But now the mysterious doors were opening, revealing the tree, gleaming like hoar-frost in the moonlight, bearing a glory of color among its hundreds of tapers, and with a transparent silvery veil enhancing its splendors, — its rosy, shining fruits, its snowy branches and sharp icicles, its white floating angels and golden-winged cherubs.

It revolved. It did not tip. The treacherous music-box gave no inward groan, but conscientiously tinkled out its harmonious "Home, Sweet Home" to the very end, and began again; and the wanderers were duly moved to give a passing kindly thought to their fair land beyond the sea, never indeed quite forgotten.

Bruce, leaving Rose and Marjorie in the guardianship of the subtly smiling Greek god, slipped behind the little group to the doorway where aunt Serena was standing with Mr. Raymond, watching the flushed, delighted faces of the children. Quietly dispossessing Raymond, much to that gentleman's amusement, Bruce led her into the library opposite. He was very grave. His eyes were dark with strong emotion.

"Madame Serena," he said, giving her the little, stately name which he thought suited her, and which had never displeased her, "one day, long ago, — at least it seems long to me since I first had the happiness of seeing you, — I gave into your hands a rose. Dear Madame Serena, will you give her — your Rose to me now?"

There was utter silence in the library. Opposite, the patient music-box was emphatically reiterating "Home, Sweet Home;" the children's happy laughter, and the warmth and cheerful lights and kindly voices, told the same tale; and here was this young man wanting a "Sweet Home" for himself and her little girl.

Was this not indeed what aunt Serena both wished and expected? Yet now that it had come, and Sydney Bruce stood waiting, his handsome, earnest face bent down towards her, in his manner a fine deference and controlled eagerness, it seemed to her a very solemn, fateful moment. It was Rosamond, her child, that this man wanted. It was Rosamond's whole future that was coming to meet her with swift bounds. She looked into the honorable, manly face which she knew so well, not doubting, yet seeking to prove him, to reach his very soul. The clear eyes responded truth for truth. He smiled a slow, kindly, reassuring smile down at this fine, anxious, lovely old lady.

"Madame Serena," he said, holding out both hands, "will you trust her to me?"

Aunt Serena was trembling a little. She was deeply agitated.

But holding herself bravely erect, with her stateliest, gentlest grace, as befitted the giving of a royal gift, she smiled back at him, and, extending her delicate hands, said with affection, yet with a certain quaint formality, —

"My dear friend, I will send my niece Rosamond to you."

Bruce, much moved, stooped, and kissed the trembling hands that lay in his own.

With a tender color on her cheek, she went softly in to the others. In the hall, she hurriedly wiped away two loving tears with her very best point-lace handkerchief. "I am a most irrational old woman," she thought. "Am I trying to persuade myself I am not glad? I am most thoroughly glad." And then she wiped away two tears more.

Mrs. Raymond, her hands filled with packages, said brightly, as if quite unaware of the significance of that *tête-à-tête* in her library, —

"Miss Lennox, it is only once a year that I neglect my guests for the children; but Youth reigns to-night. *Vive le roi!* Miss Wellesley, your turn and Miss Peyton's come now; then we older ones may presume to open our boxes, if royalty permits."

"We do, mamma," cried Edith graciously; and Mrs. Raymond hurried back to the stores she was distributing.

"Child," — and in aunt Serena's quiet voice was an unspeakable blessing upon all the fair years that had been and all that were to come, — "our

friend, Mr. Bruce, is waiting for you in the library. Go to him, Rosamond."

He was standing facing the half-open door. She came softly, shyly in, her heavy white draperies clinging about her lithe form, her great eyes solemnly upraised to his. She looked slightly pale, and very young. She walked directly towards him in simple obedience to his summons, as Marjorie might have done. Bruce was inexpressibly touched by it.

"Rose! my little Rose!" he murmured, placing his hands gently on her shoulders, drawing her nearer and nearer, his steadfast eyes begging her to have no fear of him.

The low sweetness of the strong man's voice, his beautiful face bending down to her, and his firm and gentle hands holding her near, were a wonderful revelation to happy, troubled, trembling Rose. "I will be faithful! I will be faithful!" said the pure voice of her maiden soul. And into the face of the man who loved her she looked the same innocent look of rapt devotion which had shone upon him out of the dusk the evening before, which had answered his tender words with its ineffable promise.

He drew her to his breast; and on her hair, her cheek, her fair, round neck, fell his light kisses. Her face was hidden like a child's against him. She trembled still, but she did not seek to escape: she was offering up her soul to him in a passion of loyalty. Again she saw the high oaks of the Nest, and the lilies and the shining water, and heard, as

if it were another's, her own prophetic "it must be something very grand and sweet and sad." And now two loving arms were holding her fast, and a voice was murmuring half-spoken words in her ear, — soothing words, as if she were a little untamed thing, eager for its freedom. And it was grand to care for such a man, and promise him faith for all time; and it was sweet — ah, the sweetness of it! — and it was sad, with an indefinable sadness. And all this the young girl thought, perhaps with her happy heart-beats, perhaps with her exalted enraptured soul; for in her head there seemed to be only a sweet confusion and immeasurable wonder, and she had no theories to expound as she had had for poor Harold; no words indeed for this strong, stately lover, who took her in his arms and kissed her hair, and called her his Rose of the world.

At length he lifted her drooping head, and looked at her.

"What ever sent you to me, child?" he asked thoughtfully.

With one of the quick transitions so natural to her, over her young face flitted a light, amused smile; and she answered, —

"Aloha."

"I will crown him king of the beasts. Was it in the woods that day that he told you to come, dear?"

She looked at him in mute amazement.

"But I was near to you even then. I could have stepped across the brook, and taken you in my

arms; I could have kissed away your tears: but you would have been angry then. I have been waiting for you ever since. I was waiting for you before; I have always been waiting for you, heart of my heart!" and he kissed her innocent, wondering lips.

"Miss Rose, Miss Rose! Please come!" cried Marjorie in the hall, then ran lightly into the room. "Oh, uncle Cid, do you mind? You may have her again, you know, all the other days; but Christmas is the children's day, and I'm going to give mamma the swan."

"May I have her all the other days, little Marjorie?"

Rosamond stooped, and pressed her cheek against the child's soft curls.

"You shall have her, Marjorie. You have sacred claims on her and me, but I must have you both;" and, led by Marjorie, they went back to the others.

Mrs. Raymond came directly towards them.

"My dear child!" she said warmly, kissing Rose with a supremely delighted look. Her cares and fears were at an end. Sydney was safely moored.

"Why do you kiss Miss Rose, mamma?" inquired Edith. "She did not just come, and it is not time for her to go."

"She kisses her because she loves her," explained Marjorie. "So do I: so does uncle Cid."

Mr. Raymond, with one cordial word, welcomed the young girl into their inner circle. Gertrude looked beatific.

It began to seem less strange, now; and everybody was so kind! Presently Harold stood beside her: on his face various emotions were struggling for mastery.

"Is this true?" he asked, with a great, glad ring in his voice.

"I think so."

"O Rose!" and he shook her hands vigorously, "what a dear you are to get me out of it! You always were the kindest girl. I have been a mean-spirited craven, and now I feel like a god; and you've done it, Rose, you've done it. I never can thank you enough. I can't tell you now, but to-morrow I will," he whispered.

"But I know, Harold. I knew to-day, when I saw you look at her. Why did you mind me, dear boy? You ought to have been sure I would help you, even" — and her voice was low and mischievous — "'if the years that shall make you more of a man shall'" —

"O hush, Rose! Don't be hard on a fellow Christmas Eve, — and your affairs at high tide. I *have always* liked Bruce, Rose. I am mighty glad it's Bruce."

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Mr. Thornton," Bruce said quietly, coming up behind them. "I have always liked you."

Unabashed and laughing, Harold held out his hand.

That blessed Christmas Eve! Why should it not have been a golden time? Happiness, like a dove, had descended upon them; and they did not drive

away that coy and transient guest with one forbidding look or mien of suffering melancholy. Desolate, pitiful hours had come to most of them, as come they must. They had tasted the dead-sea fruit of the world's disappointments. They had known heavy grinding care and pale sorrow. Life with its burdens was on them, yet also life's rapture and glory. And Christmas bade them take courage, and be glad. "Remember us," warned the voices of the past. "Beloved, ye too are welcome," answered the faithful voices of to-day. "Absent and unforgotten, rejoice with us."

And from Rosamond's pure eyes shone the same love-light that had once transfigured her young mother's face; while in the tender strength of her lover, aunt Serena recognized the power that had swayed her own far-off girlhood. The new was ever repeating the old; and the vast, subtle forces of nature were working out their infinite progressions. And she looked thoughtfully upon the fresh, flower-like maidenhood, the men in their goodly strength, and heard with thankfulness the light, rippling laughter of the children. "It will pass away," she mused, "yet not in vain is it here. If not for us, the harvest is for others. 'There shall never be one lost good.' The warmth of this one evening reaches farther than we know in ever-widening immeasurable circles. We are imperfect beings, but we are very lovable," smilingly thought this mild judge of her fellow-men; "and we are the best we have — at present."

Age, serene and beautiful as summer twilight; calm, trustful, married life; young lovers entering their paradise; young lovers far from theirs indeed, yet cheerfully, if with some unavoidable detentions, on the way; and the sovereign children in the splendor of their Christmas purple; while the indefatigable music-box, quietly encouraged by Elise, ground on, like the salt-mill that forever grinds, and keeps the great sea salt, until it was silenced to yield to Gertrude, who sang as even she had never sung before; and the broad, dignified, noble melody of Stradella's "O Salutaris" soared on, and met the Christmas chimes at midnight.

CHAPTER XIX.

"I will lift mine eyes unto the hills."

"CAN a man never please himself?" said Harold, who had been pleasing himself systematically for twenty years. With a frown he turned away, and looked far down the valley. He was driving slowly with aunt Serena, a gray February day, up towards a villa upon which she had certain undefined but persistent designs.

"She misses you, Harold. You are all she has."

"She is not unhappy," he said moodily.

"She has been very good to spare you so long."

"A man of my age cannot be expected to sit in the chimney corner, and toast his feet."

Aunt Serena smiled imperturbably.

"You have been here three months. In less than six we shall all come back to the Nest."

"I see no reasonable objection to my waiting for you. In fact, it is the most natural thing in the world for me to do."

"The most natural and reasonable thing is for you to yield to your mother, and go at once."

Harold maintained stern silence.

At length aunt Serena began again,—

"May I speak to you with perfect frankness?"

"Of course. Why not?" But his permission was not sufficiently affable to be encouraging.

"Then *I* wish you to go home. You will go to please your mother, I am sure," she said tranquilly. "But I, too, am anxious to send you away for a time."

"I suppose so," he muttered gloomily. "You have not a ray of confidence in a man unless he happens to be exactly thirty-two."

She turned her benign face fully upon him, and said with deliberate earnestness, —

"Harold, I found here a brave little girl working away against heavy odds, with oppressive memories haunting her, with no apparent promise in her future. I do not intend, being at present personally responsible, to allow any undesirable complications to intrude upon her present restfulness."

"Am I an undesirable complication?"

"You might be," she answered with her loveliest smile.

He deigned to laugh a little. "I cannot quarrel with you, aunt Serena. You have me at an advantage."

"I know that I have, dear. Now listen. You have been silent thus far, not out of consideration for any of us, you know, but simply from" —

"Disgust with myself. Nevertheless, I have not a fickle nature. In the face of facts, I swear it," he returned resolutely.

"From motives of your own," she continued in her unruffled, civil manner, "and at all events I

approve of your outward course. If the dearest lad that ever had patience with a prosy old woman will let me advise him now, this is what I say. Go home, simply because you ought. What nobler thing can a man do than his simple duty? Then, if you stay, what will it profit you? Do you think she will listen to you now? She has an uncompromising, honest pride of her own; and she is wiser than her years. She will come with me. Your mother will know her then. It will be quite different. Leave the dear girl trustfully, with the friendly hope of seeing her again. Leave her to the future and to me. I deny you nothing, except my permission to be rash and inconsiderate. I oppose no tide of feeling; and if I were so unwise, youth is stronger than I. But I say, because I love you, Harold, and because I love her, wait. Be sure of yourself. This time make no protestations (she had never before alluded to his little romance with Rose). You have been a boy. Do you hope to win Gertrude? Be a man."

"It is no use. You would make a hero of a brute. I will go. I suppose I must do as you wish. I know you are right, but it is hard."

"Yes, it is hard," she said.

"Do you trust me?" and he turned squarely upon her.

"I trust your honorable heart. I sometimes distrust your hasty, extravagant impulse. I am sure that I shall have reason later to trust your manly steadfastness."

"You shall indeed!" he exclaimed honestly, "and

I will go at once. But you'd better send me soon, while I am in a reformed state."

"The sooner the better, my dear," she replied with strong and kind approval.

Harold left them in a couple of days. He appeared well in the parting scene. Aunt Serena was proud of him. He only said to Gertrude, "Then I shall surely see you at the Nest, Miss Peyton, before the summer is gone? *Auf Wiedersehen.*" If his strong blue eyes flashed one word more into hers, if his hand-pressure was longer than strict ceremony required, aunt Serena did not blame him, nor did Gertrude. Baldur the Beautiful is gone, she said to herself many times that day, missing his sunshiny presence, and his friendly care of her. But she knew that his warm welcome would gladden her on those other shores, and she trusted aunt Serena. Gertrude was of a faithful and grateful nature, and he had been good to her. She loved sunshine, and a little went with the fair-haired bonny lad. So she remembered him in her quiet, patient heart.

There were many reasons why aunt Serena, at this time, wished to leave the *pension*. One excellent one was that they were tired of it. At best, it lacked the freedom and peace of home. There were too many incongruous elements. As a temporary thing, it was very well, and had no doubt served its useful disciplinary purposes. But the experiment had been tried. There seemed to be nothing more to be learned from it. Indeed, certain experiences grew with each repetition less endurable.

Since the announcement of Rose's engagement, Mrs. Vivien had been, what most women would have unhesitatingly called, intrusive and odious in the extreme. Aunt Serena's severest epithet was "incomprehensible." Rose began to shrink instinctively from her next-door neighbor's visits. Mrs. Vivien said nothing, which, narrated or complained of, would have seemed to have sufficient weight to lie heavily upon any one's spirits. But her chatter was depressing to Rose. It is easy for a generous girl to look in her lover's face, and think, What do I care for his past! I love it, since it has led him step by step to me, and thus, with one grand gesture, wave it out of her remembrance. But it is not easy for her when she finds that others are free to discuss her hero's human weaknesses; that her noble reticence does not silence other lips; that her judgment of him goes for nothing; and that the very nature of her position renders her helpless to defend him from shallow, ignoble critics.

Mrs. Vivien was an adept in giving small stabs. Rose had received some of which aunt Serena was unaware. Once or twice Mrs. Vivien had "run in" when Miss Lennox was out and Rose was alone, "to be neighborly," the little woman said. Perhaps another girl would have shrunk with less horror from minute details of her lover's experiences, and from innunendoes more expressive than words. It may be that another girl would have ventured to jest with him about them, and so quiet any vague restlessness they might have caused her.

But Rose could not; nor could she bring malicious, petty stories of his life into his noble presence. She did not believe one of them; and none of them, indeed, merited belief. Some were the interpretation of a base mind; some were the creations of malice. Nevertheless, they distressed her. Her proud, pure nature recoiled from hearing even his name used carelessly as a common thing. She was not curious, and her trust in him was unspeakable. Yet sometimes she would look at him with a deep wistfulness he could not fathom.

"What is it, my little Rose?"

"I wish I were older," she would say. "Are you sure I am old enough for you? I am so ignorant of life. If I were older I should understand many things better."

Then he would comfort her with a lover's fond assurances, and she would forget her fears. Yet against her will, in some inexplicable way, the fifteen years' difference in their ages grew in her childish fancy like a chasm between them, over which even her love could throw no bridge. Mrs. Vivien had succeeded simply in making her depressed, — doubtful of herself. "I will be all I may to him," she would say fervently. "I will learn to be more."

Unreserved in all else to aunt Serena, she was reticent with regard to her lover. What she felt, indeed, she could not have expressed in words. The lesson of her own insufficiency had been taught her with such gradual insinuations, she could hardly

have told how she had learned it. Ambiguous suggestions of a complex society life, which she had never known; pretty enthusiasms about the transcendent perfection of women of the great world, who had enthralled her lover when she was still playing with dolls; enlightenment as to the grand passion a man feels once, and never again, the mad infatuation being, as a rule, followed by weariness, and afterwards by an amiable toleration of some gentle being, upon whom he deigns to bestow whatever feeble warmth remains in the ashes of his burnt-out affections, — all this and more, in Mrs. Vivien's delicate and playful rendering, the inexperienced child could neither openly resent, nor yet quite forget. She was too far from this other world to be able to judge it clearly; and the rumors that floated to her from it perplexed her, because of the atmosphere of mystery which enveloped them. Had there been any thing for her active spirit to do, any thing to fairly meet, to refute, she would have suffered less. But these attenuated, poisonous dilutions instilled a slow pain in her young heart. Pride forbade her to complain of it. She scorned it, struggled with it; but its dull throb was hard to bear.

Strictly speaking, it was perhaps an infinitesimal wavering cloud of jealousy which occasioned her mute distress. Yet it would seem that a word less severe, and less suggestive of ignoble emotion, ought to be chosen to depict the uneasiness that overhung this loyal, tender child's untried spirit, the

increasing self-distrust, the consciousness of those fifteen fatal years of mysterious experience and untold wisdom that lay between him and her. Sometimes she would suddenly grow shy, not daring to disclose to him her eager fancies. If perfect love casteth out fear, Rose's was by no means perfect; but it was perhaps sufficiently near perfection for any mortal man to win.

The timid homage which she offered him, the tremulous stir in her face of half-understood emotion, the rapture of her welcome, when all her youth in its glad, pure strength looked out of her lovely eyes, and the fine reserve of her dawning womanliness guarded the door of her lips, made her to Bruce a perfect pearl of girlhood. He found in her all that he could desire. The childlike element in her he loved as something sacred. He was charmed with her simplicity, her appreciation and sympathy whenever he spoke earnestly with her of his plans. Already she had unconsciously inspired him with more active and larger aims. He did not talk much of his past, for the simple reason that he was apt to forget it in her presence. It seemed worthless to him, compared with the rich and satisfying future opening before them. He had, indeed, no especial mysteries or crimes on his conscience; but, had he known the delicate tissues of perplexity which malice was weaving about her, he would have unhesitatingly laid before her all of his life that it was fitting for her young eyes to gaze upon.

Meanwhile aunt Serena was fully persuaded it

was time to leave the *pension*. She had her good and sufficient reasons. If she and Gertrude did not know absolutely all causes why Rosamond's bright happiness was now and then dimmed by intangible clouds, their loving intuition perceived much. This was not a family where everybody's emotions are arraigned each day before a council of ten or three.

"I prefer the air on the hills now that spring is coming," aunt Serena announced quite generally. Frau Rudolph's chuckle was less audible and frequent in those days when the departure was under open consideration. Indeed, Molly and Daisy, whose round eyes usually saw all that there was to be seen, reported that she had mixed her black coffee with a few rare tears the afternoon that aunt Serena and the two young girls finally drove away from her door. Be that as it may, — an actual, if surprising fact, or a mere extravagance of the youthful and reduplicated imagination of the twins, — the excellent woman, true to her principles of always being ready to recognize the mobile character of her flock, cheerily supported aunt Serena in the execution of her plans; was even, with Mr. Raymond, instrumental in securing a short lease of the coveted villa; and at the parting moment bravely stood her ground with the same "They-come-and-they-go" smile with which she had greeted them as perfect strangers. That was what she deemed upholding the dignity of her calling. But if she afterwards retired to her small room, and locked the door, let us not intrude with prying eyes upon her brief but

voluntary seclusion from the world, nor seek to lay bare the jealously guarded motives which led her to send odd and dainty little baskets of sweetmeats up to the villa on the hill, and, after her busy day was done, not unfrequently to toil up the warm, long slope which led to it, and the kind welcome which always awaited her in its cool garden. She never divulged her private views upon this subject. Let us respect her dignified reticence. Not every woman, we are told, can keep a secret.

It was in March when they moved up to the villa. This was not merely a villa on a hill, but a villa at the glorious crown of a succession of noble hills, waving up in long, gentle undulations to the lovely, lofty spot where it stood. Five forest-roads met and crossed before its door, and witches must have held high carnival there in the merry old witch-days. Indeed, what with the wind and the gloom, and the magic of some nights, it was easy to suspect them of still haunting those mystic precincts. One broad, fine carriage-road wound, with easy turnings, up from the city. Two roads came more abruptly up, and were climbed by good walkers, sometimes by carts. One swept with a long curve round a droll little village and a tiny lake. One led straight into the woods, and ran into a labyrinth of lovely wood-roads, broad and narrow, level and steep, always enchanting.

The villa, — built by a Polish gentleman, from caprice, abandoned from the same dominant principle of all his actions, — although perched as high

as an eagle's eyry, was yet in itself a quiet, home-like little house, resting with its gardens in what Rose called a dimple in the face of the hill. Before it stood with singular effect seven giant poplar-trees. These were most impressive in their extraordinary height, and as conspicuous in their loneliness as the "Three Sisters" of the Roman Forum. Visible from a point far down the valley, always looming up in their vivid and solemn loftiness, whatever else was concealed by the wooded windings of the road, their mystic number increased their subtle charm; and the perpetual, mysterious flutter of their delicate leaves far up on that breezy height whispered unspeakable things to hearts that loved to listen.

"We cannot pronounce 'Tarnorowowski,' or whatever it may be, with the slightest hope of success," said aunt Serena one day. "We must re-christen the villa for our own temporary use."

"Why not call it 'Seven Poplars?' That is simple, and we can pronounce it in the few languages of which we know any thing," suggested Rose, listening to the innumerable voices of their leaves. Standing near them, she turned away from gazing at Wynburg and the plain beyond and the distant mountain-range; and as she looked in her lover's eyes, her cares sank down into the valley.

CHAPTER XX.

"Fair? yes, yes! the rippled shadow
Of that midnight hair
Shows above her brow — as clouds do
O'er the moon — most fair.

. . . . . .

Shaming truth with truthful seeming;
While her laugh, light, low,

And her subtle mouth that murmurs,
And her silken cheek,
And her eyes, say that she dissembles,
Plain as speech could speak."

EDWIN ARNOLD: *The Indian Song of Songs.*

LIFE on the heights suited them all. Aunt Serena was again in a natural position, directing her little household, dispensing hospitalities, and working daily in her garden, with a gentle joy in every growing leaf. Gertrude, for the first time since her childhood, was at home. Rosamond dreamed her happy girlish dreams in which Bruce was by turns every hero of every high romance, only somewhat nobler than all. The Seven Poplars looked down upon an ideal life. They heard long, friendly, earnest talks. Much light laughter floated about their sombre stateliness, and sometimes a whisper beneath them would make a maiden's heart as tremulous as their own sensitive foliage.

Spring was working its quiet will on sunny hill-slopes and in dark forest-depths. Every day new glories disclosed themselves. The woods near by were of rare beauty, soft and clear and mossy under foot, magnificently high, tempting one ever on and on through their vast arches.

Up through the shady road and round a sharp corner, there was a grove of great, murmuring pines. Off in another direction, a narrow way — a perfect lovers' path, wide enough for two horses abreast — led them under a rich growth of soft acacias which met overhead. Here they often rode in fragrant May twilights.

They searched the woods for its treasures. They learned its trees, most of them indeed stanch old friends. They met the wild forget-me-nots and lilies-of-the-valley as they came. Aunt Serena said one day "that she thought, even at the Nest the birds had never sounded so marvellously sweet."

"Germans are very musical," Rose replied soberly. "These birds may have more musical traditions and more science; but the birds at the Nest have great natural talent."

"There are no nightingales there," said aunt Serena with soft regret.

Again, they were telling Gertrude and Bruce how the Nest looked.

"I can't imagine any thing prettier than this," Gertrude had said.

"It may not be prettier, — except to us," aunt Serena gently explained.

"It is quite different," said Rose. "Here we are as high as a robber knight's castle, and not much more retired, although that wild white-rose hedge is some protection," she laughingly admitted; "and there the great oaks shut us in away from the whole world."

"Then, I shall prefer the Nest," Bruce said, smiling.

"This has a broader landscape. This is more airy," reflected aunt Serena, wishing to be quite impartial.

"Ah, but we have the sea!" Rose exclaimed.

"And the Nest is — home," aunt Serena said.

"And Aloha stands in his stall, and looks over his shoulder for his mistress," Bruce suggested.

"Not always," Rose said practically. "Old John is faithful. He exercises him properly, I am sure. But he will know me. You will all see."

Still, in spite of their loyalty to the Nest, they grew strongly attached to their little home on the hill-top; and they made it charming for their Wynburg friends. Bruce sent up, for Rose's pleasure, a Hermes like his sister's. They placed him in the garden, facing the poplars.

"The god of travellers," said Bruce, "shall guard all wayfarers who pass by these intersecting roads."

"All the funny peasants tramping by, and the cattle and the dogs, and the soldiers going to and from the parade-ground, and gay students singing their loud, late songs, and Lieut. von Falkenstein,

his brother officers and our own friends, and the court-people, and the postilions with their horns, and even their majesties, — it is a goodly company," said Rose, greatly pleased; "and we, we are travellers too. Dear Hermes, bless them all — and us."

June came with her roses, and Rose was glad at heart. She was going to be eighteen. Her uneasy wonderings had been blown away by the pure hill-breezes; and then, Mrs. Vivien, though she came often enough, could not exactly run in with impunity, bringing her gray stocking and many-colored reminiscences. The little lady, too, like every thing in nature, moved with a sort of rhythm, even in her naughtiness. It had its ascending and descending cadences. Malice, like love and joy, has a tide. Hers, at this moment, was apparently at low ebb. But Rosamond still wished to be older, though forgetful of the course of reasoning that had led her to this conclusion. She confided to Gertrude, with a solemnly childlike air, that she thought, after she was eighteen, she might dare to call Mr. Bruce Sydney; which, curiously enough, she had never yet done.

She was very lovely in her special manner to Bruce. As he himself had foreseen, it proved to be quite different from her cousinly treatment of Harold. Ingenuous, sufficiently, often playfully, familiar in her speech, yet always with a certain delicate reserve and deference in her way of approaching him. She could not regard her lover, in the eminently practical manner of certain young women, as

a useful and creditable object to have on hand and exhibit, tolerably interesting as a novelty, but upon the whole falling far short of the last new thing in parasols. There was much that she intended to do after she was eighteen. She had as many plans as a prime minister; but they all related to one comprehensive subject, — her own intellectual development, to render herself more worthy of Bruce, who on his side regarded her as the fairest thing in mortal eyes.

It is the evening before Rosamond's birthday. Hermes has four blood-red roses given him, with a kiss in the heart of each. — The mythological dictionary had instructed Rose that four was the number sacred to the god, but it had said nothing whatever about kisses. — There is a strong breeze sweeping through the poplars, and bending the tree-tops in the woods over the way, and blowing the sweetness of the rose-garden out into the wide world. Rosamond, Gertrude, and Bruce stand at the open casement, smiling in upon aunt Serena. Her silvery hair glistens above her placid face and closed, calm eyelids; and the rich red wine in a curious antique glass on the table by her side glows like flame in the long, last rays of the western sunshine.

The good old lady thinks that she is reading, but her head nods and her book bobs. The evening breeze blows at will through the pleasant summer-room, inspiring even the sedate faded Tarnorowowski *portières* with a wild longing for adventure. It fills them grandly, blows them straight out high and

bold, holds them motionless an instant in undreamed-of loftiness, till they sink back, trailing their soft, dull, silken folds on the polished floor, rustling still with excitement, and gently whispering about it among themselves, till the strong, bold breeze comes again.

But aunt Serena pays no heed to the supernatural sprightliness of the curtains, and is not aware of the liberties that South-west Wind, Esq., is taking with the ribbons of her cap. She leans back in a comfortable arm-chair. She holds an interesting volume bravely erect. If the eyelids droop over the kind brown eyes, and the head and the book make eccentric lurches now and then, who shall venture to affirm that the little old lady is not in reality reading? What with the changing sunset-lights, and the shadows beginning to gather in the corners, it is a thing about which one need not be unpleasantly positive. Aunt Serena thinks that she is reading, and likes her friends to think so. Is this a weakness? Ask them, smiling at the window. They would tell you it is a lovely human trait, — another charm.

And knowing the dear soul, — her gracious ways; her loving kindness; her gentle witticisms; her most enchanting, fairy-godmother surprises; her penetration and blind credulity; her shrewdness, and utter ignorance of the world; the tiny glass of Greek wine which it is her almost unvarying habit to offer to every guest, even upon her very threshold; her tender solicitude about the most uninteresting peo-

ple's aches and pains and love-troubles; her old-fashioned grace; her frail, helpful hands; her smile, — yes, her smile alone, — one can easily at her bidding believe sleeping is waking, and night, day.

Except for occasional book-bobbings and head-noddings, she sits motionless. The shadows in the corners grow deeper. The fiery glow fades away from the wine. But still the curtains hold high carnival, and pleasant odors steal in from the rose-garden and the fresh woods and fragrant fields.

The three advance on tiptoe. Aunt Serena opens her eyes.

"Dear little auntie," says Rose's rich, joyous voice, "you will be blown away like the witches that used to fly over these cross-roads. The curtains are trying to stand on their heads, and in the garden even the mignonette is excited."

"Pray do not move, Madame Serena," Bruce adds quickly: "you look like a saint, against the pale gold of the dying sunset."

"Please remain quite as you are," begged Gertrude.

"Really, children!" expostulated aunt Serena, smiling.

"St. Serena," Rosamond began in an impressive voice, with an important wave of the hand. "Emblem, glass of Greek wine. Time, nineteenth century; quite as good a century as any other, and quite as much room for saintship, although popular superstition holds the contrary opinion. This saint never thought any thing about herself at all. She

had no time to stand in a niche. She would have been too busy to stay there. She wore rather rich and costly garments."

"Child!" remonstrated aunt Serena, with a somewhat deprecating look at her dress.

"Like St. Edith of Wilton," Rose continued, much encouraged by applause from the window; "who remarked, when rebuked by St. Ethelwold for her good clothes, 'God regardeth the heart alone, and can read beneath any garment. For pride,' she said, 'can exist under the garb of wretchedness; and a mind may be pure under these rich vestments, as under your tattered furs.' St. Serena, then, liked black silks of excellent quality," —

"But they wear better, dear," said a mild voice.

"And old lace, and very becoming caps. She loved the whole world, and was patient even with *Pension* Rudolph. She fed the hungry, healed the sick, was imposed upon by the poor, encouraged the lazy, believed most atrocious fibbers, and needed no hair-shirt or other penance for her soul's grace, because she had brought up from early infancy Rosamond Wellesley; and that was deemed discipline enough for one earthly pilgrimage."

"Canonized," began Gertrude, "not in the world's regular lists, but in" —

"Three irregular hearts," Bruce concluded.

"Interesting in the extreme, my dears, but unauthentic, being too strongly colored by narrow, individual views," commented aunt Serena, with

a good grace, finding escape impossible. Now, Mr. Lathrop is what I call a saint."

"Oh!" exclaimed Rose. "A thousand years ago he would have lived in a cave, and subsisted on roots, prayers, and flagellations. And you would have been quietly watching; and just at the moment when his exhausted condition was *in extremis*, you would have appeared with a bowl of nutritious soup in one hand, and a glass of Greek wine in the other: and no one would have been the wiser. And then walking home in a burning sun, with a bad headache you would have stopped by the way to extract the gravel from a dog's foot, and to pick up all the bruised children, and comfort them, and wash their faces; and it's a matter of opinion — but" — she hesitated.

"But we happen to like Abou Ben Adhem, and all his kind," said Sydney. "Madame Serena, I came in to tell you that I must go down early to-night. I promised Florence. Can I be of any service for to-morrow?"

"Thanks. There is nothing more, I believe, except to help us decide that little matter of the invitation to Mrs. Vivien."

"Oh, I do not want her!" exclaimed Rose.

Gertrude was silent.

Bruce said, "But I cannot venture to advise as to guests in your own house. If it were mine, I should have an opinion, and express it without delay.

Aunt Serena smiled appreciatively at him, then said, —

"It is such a trifling thing, after all, — one invitation more or less. It seemed to me advisable to make it an informal affair: and as it is to be a garden-party, and the children from the house are coming, and even Mrs. Lancaster, I think I would ask Mrs. Vivien; she might otherwise feel disappointed.

"But it is my birthday," sighed Rose. "I can be disappointed too."

"She has sent you flowers several times, you know," urged aunt Serena. "Would you not rather have her this once? With so many others, what does it matter to you? It would be kind to invite them all, because it is your birthday. The courtesy comes from you."

"I will do it, aunt Serena," replied Rose with dignity. "It will be more mature than to want only people whom I can tolerate. By all means let us ask Mrs. Vivien."

"Then write the note, dear; and Sydney will kindly send it up to Frau Rudolph's."

Gertrude was still silent. She had been down in the city that day, and had heard at the Conservatory the morning news of Wynburg. But she never brought it up to the Seven Poplars.

The happy morning dawned. Rosamond was eighteen. She must have retained in her composition much of the primeval savage. Four walls could never contain her in moments of joy or sorrow. She sought sympathy and comfort in the free air. She ran out early into the garden, and told Hermes. He

looked as if he knew it already; so did the poplars: but her sisters, the roses, glowed with surprise. She gazed down upon pleasant Wynburg, and the misty mountains far away, and the uncertain lights flitting over the outstretched valley; and, with her arm flung around the tallest of the poplars, she tried to realize her happiness. Chosen by him, loved by him; and only one little year since aunt Harriet had judged her and found her wanting, according to the Beaconswold standard. "Poor aunt Harriet! I will be more patient now. I will try to please her. I will sit in the Den, and sew. Nothing that she can say will hurt me now; no one can hurt me, — not even Mrs. Vivien. Aunt Harriet will be satisfied when she sees how much more dignified I have become. She will admire my repose: sometimes I am sure it is almost Beaconswoldian, only it is apt to be evanescent. She cannot help liking Sydney, and she cannot frighten him. Ah, yes: this year I shall grow to be very mature." And giving the gratified poplar a girlish hug, with many light bounds and springs she danced toward the porch to greet aunt Serena.

Soon after breakfast came a note for Miss Wellesley. Gertrude eyed it with distrust.

Rose read it gravely, and passed it silently to her aunt, who also read it, then gave it to Gertrude.

"I will answer this, dear. Mrs. Vivien should hardly permit herself so much liberty," aunt Serena said with great gentleness. "I shall tell her our

little garden-party is too informal for us to be able to avail ourselves of her suggestion."

Gertrude read again, with every satirical curve of her lips in full play, —

"I am so pleased at the delightful opportunity I shall have to present to you my cousin Eleanor, — an old friend, by the way, of the irresistible Mr. Bruce, — who is passing a few days with me on her way to join a party in the Tyrol. I have told her so much of all my Wynburg friends, among the dearest of whom I claim my charming companions of the winter, that she is perfectly wild to see you. We will, with your kind permission, come quite early to enjoy all we can of you and your beautiful home. Believe me, my dear Miss Wellesley, with a thousand thanks for your affectionate remembrance of me in your birthday joy, wishing you many happy returns, and with my love to dear Miss Lennox and sweet Miss Peyton,

"Your most devoted and attached friend,

"ALICE VIVIEN."

Then she said, "It is very bold. She thinks you cannot save yourselves. But you will not allow this?"

"Certainly not," aunt Serena replied. "If for no other reason, I have reason to believe it would be disagreeable to Mrs. Raymond. I must send some one down."

Neither of them looked at Rose, who had not yet spoken.

At length she said quietly, —

"I would prefer to allow Mrs. Vivien to bring her friend, if you have no serious objection. Let them come."

"It does not really seem desirable, Rose."

Miss Lennox's smile was a little troubled.

"Dear aunt Serena, yesterday I yielded my wish. We have invited Mrs. Vivien. To-day let us accept the consequences. I accept them." She spoke with composure and decision.

Not wishing to seem to attach too much importance to the matter, her aunt said, "As you wish, dear child. The consequences, at all events, will probably be trifling."

Rose, as she left the room, was drawing quick little breaths, and thinking eagerly, —

"She shall come. I fear no one, and no one shall dare think that I am afraid. Now I shall see this wonder of the world."

Aunt Serena looked at Gertrude, and shook her head. "I do not like it," she said frankly. "It is too dramatic for us."

"And Mr. Bruce will be exceedingly displeased."

"But he will be a great help. Dear Sydney will make things go," aunt Serena added confidently; which is all that was said at the Poplars until Bruce came up late, when he and aunt Serena had a long, and somewhat earnest, conversation. But Rose treated the matter lightly. "I will not avoid it," she thought. "Why should I?" So she said to Sydney at once, —

"Mrs. Vivien is going to bring her cousin, who has just come;" and then the loyal child looked away, that she might not surprise any sudden expression in his eyes. "She calls her Eleanor. She

says you used to know her." This was no question, but a simple statement of facts.

Bruce, with unhesitating frankness and a decided frown, answered promptly, —

"I have known her extremely well, Rose. She is to me at present the most disagreeable person in the world, and she is not a woman whom I wish you to know."

"Never mind, dear," said Rosamond, glowing with delight. Let them come on, these mysterious, beautiful Circes. What cared she? She looked at him with a charming smile. "I think," she said slowly, "that I shall begin to-day to call you Sydney."

"Angel! Begin now."

"No: later. When I quite dare. Now I must arrange the flowers; and aunt Serena wants you."

Down in the city, two women sat in Mrs. Vivien's cherubic boudoir engaged in conversation, not animated, but portentous. One reclined in a strikingly easy attitude upon the sofa. The other rocked herself gently in a low willow chair.

"What color are these infants?" inquired she of the sofa.

"Rose Wellesley has most exquisite coloring, both creamy and warm, and what the poets would call golden eyes," Mrs. Vivien answered, for once not averse to praising a woman's beauty.

"Never mind the poets," drawled a languid, lazy voice. "What do *you* call them?"

The little chair for an instant rocked faster; but the little woman in it said softly, —

"I call them simply fascinating, Eleanor, — fascinating and glorious. Changeable, don't you know, dear? Gray, with yellow lights, or yellow, with gray lights. They are not hazel, but they are too light for brown."

"And the rest of her?"

"Straight, handsome features. Tall, slight, supple, round, graceful, fair. That wonderful creamy fairness, you know, dear," — Mrs. Vaughn was a superb brunette, — "and the very prettiest hand I ever saw." — Mrs. Vaughn's hand was renowned.

"Ah, a woman's beauty merely," she said with a yawn.

"No: a man's beauty too."

"Indeed! I should not have imagined it from your description. Women never praise men's beauties, you know, unless, of course, they are magnanimous, like you, Alice. And the other?"

"Some people admire her immensely. She is slight, cold, pale, clever-looking, and extremely blond."

"Which of these babes has the honor to receive Sydney Bruce's transient adoration?"

"Why, Eleanor, I've told you repeatedly;" and Mrs. Vivien made no attempt to conceal her impatience. "It is Rose Wellesley; and it will do no good to ignore the fact that he is perfectly serious, and more in love than he ever was in his life."

"I thought there might be some mistake," Mrs.

Vaughn drawled, with another comfortable yawn. "Sometimes, you know, when there are two, things are not quite clear. What will these dear little girls be likely to wear?"

"White."

"Good. I will wear black."

"I will not disguise from you that you will have all you can do to meet them with any advantage to yourself." Mrs. Vivien volunteered this information with a smile more suggestive of satisfaction than regret.

"You speak from experience?" said the lazy, melodious voice.

"I have never had occasion to compete with either of them," Mrs. Vivien said with equal gentleness. "But I merely suggest, in your interest, that there is a difference between eighteen and thirty, — more or less, — especially at a garden-party; and that men, in their fatuity, sometimes prefer what they call freshness to ripe, though undeniable charms, like your own."

"Thanks, dear," said the beauty, with amiable indifference. "Then, I do wear well? I fancied at one time that I should not."

"But you do not ask how your old love is looking, Eleanor."

"He? I presume he looks as he did ten years ago, as he will after ten years. That kind of man is not apt to change much."

"How long since you have seen him?"

"I observe that you have not overcome your old

habit of asking questions. You know, mine is never to answer them. Still, as I have come a long distance to see you, my dear cousin, and as I have no motive for concealing from you the fact you crave, I will make an exception in your favor. It is precisely six years since I saw him under a spreading —I forget what kind of a tree. It was rather a stupid scene, if I remember. Other of my when-we-two-parted episodes have been brighter. You cannot really do much, you know, if a man neither reproaches you nor storms," she said meditatively, "but simply looks at you with steadily furious eyes, and seems to be studying you with a microscope all the time. I believe, in my emotion, I contradicted myself twice, rather dangerously; and he knew it. Now, men do not usually. I have often wondered why he did;" and she laughed her soft, pleasant laugh.

"Curious how unfortunately things work sometimes," Mrs. Vivien coolly commented. "Old Vaughn not having been so very rich after all; and Bruce, as far as I can ascertain,"—

"Alice," interrupted the liquid, lazy, insolent voice, "might I suggest that there are some subjects about which ladies do not talk?"

"Really, Eleanor, since when have you become so fastidious? and why are you so farcical as to pose for my benefit? In fact, why are you here?"

Mrs. Vaughn half closed her broad, heavy eyelids. "Questions again," she said amiably. "I am here to meet Sydney Bruce, an old and much esteemed

friend. If I enjoy Wynburg, I may stay a month or more. If not, I shall join the Cushings in the Tyrol, where I also, happily, have an old and esteemed friend. But ladies do not discuss money and men in one breath. Separately, separately, my dear Alice. That reminds me, however, to mention to you that you will have your" — she hesitated for a word, then smiled at her selection — "perquisites, in any event. Your reports through the winter were useful. Then, some years ago, there was some other affair, I believe, — I forget the name, — when you found out something for me. I never forget indebtedness — of any description. You will be safe, whatever happens. Of course I should not have come over for one."

"You would have done better to have taken my advice, and come in the winter. You are too late," Mrs. Vivien said with the emphasis of conviction.

"Pardon me for differing. I look better in summer," said the splendid dark beauty; "and he had not had time to tire of her. Then, in winter I would have had no Tyrol."

Mrs. Vivien looked at her with unwilling admiration. She considered her cousin the most beautiful and the cleverest woman she knew. But it had been rather a hard fate, she thought, always to be eclipsed by Eleanor. Sometimes she fairly hated the insolent, imperious, velvet-voiced creature; but she had never wilfully betrayed her interests.

"It will be a wonder if he escapes you, Eleanor."

"I am never over-sanguine, but I never burn my bridges behind me," she said softly.

"Only, he is not a boy, as he was the first time, nor yet so impressionable as he was the second, when you had him fast, and lost him, — it seems to me, by the only poor management of your life."

"These things are fate. Had the result been brilliant, you would not have called the means poor management. As for the past, I have enjoyed myself, and regret nothing. Alice, let us give our attention to the immediate future. I shall not need you at the old lady's *fête-champêtre*. You can send me alone, if you please."

"In all my life I have never known such incomparable insolence!" Mrs. Vivien exclaimed sharply. "You are superb, my dear Eleanor. But, when you presume to dictate to this extent, you must yourself see that it is folly."

"Softly, softly;" and Mrs. Vaughn laughed with perfect amiability. "Kindly grasp the idea, as soon as convenient, that I simply do not want you. I have a certain prejudice, unfounded it may be, against being at critical moments under the espionage of — a relative, we will say. It interferes with the perfect freedom of action essential to the true artist. So you will have a neuralgic headache, if you please. It's no use to oppose me, Alice;" and she smiled her languid, lovely smile. Then, slowly raising her white, firm, right hand, the long fingers outstretched, she brought it down as if crushing some infinitesimal insect with her soft, cruel palm.

"You will flutter on successfully many years, if I do not interfere. You are a woman whom the world tolerates: it is hard to say why, except that the world is a fool. Better and worse women suffer, but your kind succeeds. You are not beautiful enough, clever enough, or fascinating enough to seem dangerous, I presume; so the credulous world assumes that you are a nice little woman. And you are, Alice, a nice, purr-y little woman; pretty, too; and clever enough, my dear, quite clever enough to be sensible, and not force me to ruin your Wynburg career." All this she said with her pleasantly modulated, calm voice. "You know it would not be difficult. I should be sorry to seem uncousinly, since the discerning world likes you so well. But, if you interfere with me, I shall do it. And as you care for what I could say of you, and as I care nothing whatever for what you could say of me, you would do better to have the headache, *Alicia mia.*"

There was something terrible, even to Mrs. Vivien, in the insolent, imperturbable quiet of this beautiful creature. It was as impossible to quarrel with her as with aunt Serena, but from diametrically opposed causes. Mrs. Vivien recognized a master spirit.

"Eleanor, you are a very strange woman. Play whatever game you choose," she said, and did not for the moment rock.

"Good. Now ask your German dumpling, who, by the way, reads you with her shrewd eyes shut, to send me a broiled chicken and half a bottle of dry champagne at one o'clock. I shall not lunch with

your herd again. Ugly women destroy my appetite, and I never lunch heavily when a fine stroke of diplomacy is pending. However, whether I succeed or not, we can dine well other days. We'll go down to the hotel to-morrow, and celebrate either our victory or defeat. In the latter case, there remain the green hills of Tyrol. And between us, Alice," — she threw her handsome arms over her head with a slow, indolent grace, and in her smile was the memory of some extremely amusing experience, — "between us, Sydney is a grain too soulful to enchain my permanent fancy."

"Your *what?*"

"My somewhat volatile interest, then. Oh, I can do it for a time admirably. I used to have as many high thoughts as he, and I was exceedingly fond of Sydney; but it would bore me to keep myself perpetually tuned up to his lofty pitch. Now, Jack Cushing, who is very good-natured, and in his way quite as handsome as Sydney, would only require that his wife should be beautiful, and dress with elegance. Well, well. We will see," she said, with indulgent consideration of their respective charms. "Do not forget the chicken at one, please. Then, I'll sleep till four, when you may send somebody with hot water. And now I'll read, if you don't mind, my dear Alice. Thanks for every thing. The champagne dry — did you remember? — and *frappé.*" And she lay back among the cushions with the contented sigh of an infant.

CHAPTER XXI.

"What a thing friendship is, world without end!"
ROBERT BROWNING.

"Yet courage, Soul! Nor hold thy hope in vain.
In Faith, o'ercome the steeps God set for thee.
Beyond the mountain summits of great pain
Lieth — thine Italy!"

THE other guests had long been assembled at the Poplars, when Mrs. Vaughn's carriage drove up. She did not come early, as Mrs. Vivien had announced, but waited until the western light was in what she considered a sufficiently beautifying condition. Lady Manners was there, enjoying a quiet chat with aunt Serena; and Mrs. Lancaster sat near, silent and softened. Tears of joy started to her eyes as she saw her Molly and Daisy playing lawn-tennis with Lady Manners's little Lucy, their flaxen braids flying, their long, slight feet springing in unison with the braids and feet of aristocracy. Aunt Serena thoroughly appreciated her emotion, and could not repress a smile, yet liked the woman rather better than before. "She is a little amusing, of course," she thought; "but there is something very genuine in her." "Mrs. Lancaster," she said with real sympathy, "you are happy, I see, in watching your children's pleasure. They are such

good little girls," she added heartily. "I shall miss Molly and Daisy when I go."

"They are good little girls," Mrs. Lancaster replied with tearful emphasis; and in her pleasurable agitation forgot to mention that they were always perfectly chaperoned. It actually seemed for the moment as if it pleased her to hear them simply called good.

Mrs. Van Rensalaer and Mrs. Raymond, Mr. Raymond and Mr. Van Rensalaer, — there *was* a Mr. Van Rensalaer, an excellent man, if somewhat lost in the glory radiating from his wife, — were engaged in an animated discussion with aunt Serena's German banker and his wife. Rose and Gertrude, with Kitty Van Rensalaer and the banker's daughters, were shooting at a target, Bruce, von Falkenstein, and one or two lieutenants standing by.

A few musicians were playing on an upper balcony, at an agreeable distance; servants were offering refreshments at informal little tables. While the lights in the fragrant garden were perfection in their softness, Eleanor Vaughn, with sinuous, slow grace, — her long draperies trailing behind her, her perfect shoulders and arms merely suggesting themselves through half-transparent black, dusky-red roses at her girdle, a dusky red-rose glow on her beautiful cheek, low-browed, with lovely, languid eyes and softly-smiling lips, — came over the smooth lawn towards aunt Serena, murmuring Mrs. Vivien's excuses and her own gratification. Her rare voice, with its sweet, slow modulations, made an excellent im-

pression. Aunt Serena was surprised by this brilliant solitary figure; but she was an Arab in her ideas of hospitality. "Cousin Alice prevailed upon me to come, although I told her it was almost too selfish to leave her, suffering, and enjoy her friend's Paradise. Now, indeed, since I have seen it, it seems doubly selfish." She was telling Miss Lennox this, not with Mrs. Vivien's flattering air, but with calm, suave sincerity of manner, when Rosamond, radiant and smiling, her long bow in her hand, came quickly over from the other lawn to receive the late guest with pointed courtesy. Gertrude, as *quasi* daughter of the house, followed. As she approached, her hand seemed quite accidentally to dislodge three or four dark-red roses which she had worn in her belt. They were the same kind that Mrs. Vaughn was wearing, and in the same position. Bruce, too, walked leisurely over with Gertrude.

"We need not present Mr. Bruce, I believe," Rose said with precisely appropriate conventional intonation, her long bow pointing over her shoulder, standing, with a spirited and pretty pose of the head, and altogether a virgin-huntress air. Mrs. Vaughn extended her hand with graciously cordial but not too vivid remembrance. Bruce bowed gravely over it; but then he always bowed gravely. His face expressed no sentiment of pleasure or the reverse, as he replied with brief civility to her salutation.

Aunt Serena felt relieved. Surely there was nothing formidable about this. It was not in the

least dramatic. On the contrary, Mrs. Vaughn was charmingly well-bred. Except for her marvellous beauty, against which aunt Serena, unlike Mrs. Lancaster and other excellent matrons, had no inveterate prejudice, she would not have been striking. Her indolent repose, and low, melodious voice, were quiet in the extreme. There was not one abrupt movement, not a sharp corner in her speech or her person. All was slow, sleepy grace, like heavy water-lilies on a torpid lake, soothing as the soft plashing of gentle waves. Her beautiful monotony and lovely inertia were replete with fascination. She was, however, according to her own not inapt classification, emphatically a man's beauty. "Women do not like my mouth," she would say to her cousin Alice. "It has too many curves for them. It is not small and prim enough. They are afraid of it. Well, well! it is not exactly methodistical, I admit; but I and my mouth agree marvellously well; and, do you know? I like it:" and her low, melodious laughter would ripple from her gleaming scarlet lips. She was a gorgeous, languid, tropical flower, with, no doubt, her special use in the economy of nature.

"Will you not come with us, Mrs. Vaughn?" Rosamond asked with her girlish graciousness. Ah, how the child's heart beat under the white folds of her simple summer-dress! How she longed to do her best! Sydney was looking at her. The men on the balcony were playing selections from "Lohengrin." It was the sun, no doubt, that sent the fitful

red to her cheek. "Would you not like to take my bow, Mrs. Vaughn?"

"I would much rather watch you, Miss Wellesley," said the lady slowly, with an amused, indulgent smile; and the two walked together over the smooth turf. "Chaste Diana and an houri," thought Bruce. Gertrude could have kissed Rose's light feet in her devotion and love and pity.

"Little brave heart," she thought; "how gallantly she bears it! If the evening were only over! But I am on guard, Madame Cleopatra! I am watching your very breath."

The four were about to pass the group in which Mrs. Raymond stood. Mr. and Mrs. Raymond advanced with civil incoherent murmurs. "Never shall that woman imagine I dread her," thought Florence Raymond; "but I do, I do, — every hair on her beautiful head, every glance of her lovely, sleepy, diabolical eyes. Sydney's face does not betray him. If I could see into his heart! Dear little Rose! Dear, pure, perfect, June Rose!" This while she was courteously remarking, "You are remarkably little changed, Mrs. Vaughn. Yes, thanks: those are my little girls with the darker hair."

The young lieutenants stood in an entranced semicircle round Eleanor Vaughn's garden-chair. Ah, this was a woman! How she leaned and how she listened! What is a trifle like a language, when chivalry lies at the feet of beauty? Then, there was French, which both she and the lieutenants spoke with beautiful but reckless confidence.

The setting sun sent its last greeting to her warm dark cheek. The fragrant breeze moved the lace on her perfect throat. The heavy fringed eyelids drooped and rose and drooped again. She was making no effort to charm. She was as natural as the slow beckoning of the drowsy branches in the twilight woods. The strong fire of her eyes looked out of depths as hazy and beguiling as the wavering mountain-mists. Von Falkenstein shot at random; "it is almost too dark," he said apologetically: but Rose hit the bull's eye every time. "I rejoice that this woman has come," thought Bruce. "If she humiliates me, she shows me, even clearer than I knew before, how utterly I belong to my little love, — brain and heart, soul and body." Yet his grave face gave no sign of feeling. And so the complex evening wore along.

Once, as Eleanor Vaughn went with von Falkenstein to the white-rose hedge under the poplars, to see the lights steal out of the darkness down in the city, she came upon Edith and Marjorie walking slowly together in the narrow path. She had no affection for children, — no antipathy, yet no love. With outstretched palms, one to the right and one to the left, and with her soft, unyielding strength, she gently pushed the sisters out of her way.

"Do not presume to push me, madame!" cried Edith in shrill French, the first language she had learned, invariably with her the language of strong emotion. But sweet Marjorie gave a broad leap, like a startled fawn, and turning, silently faced the

lady, with wondering, contemplative eyes. Until they were sent home with Elise, Molly and Daisy and Mrs. Lancaster, — early, just as the wonderful lieutenants had begun their gyrations, their spurs clicking and their sabres swinging in the dance, — those two children were a study to Mrs. Vaughn. "It must be their interesting Bruce blood," she concluded. But how absurd of these mites! Edith, painful as it is to relate, would station herself firmly within two feet of Mrs. Vaughn, her back turned, her head looking over her shoulder, with her mamma's society expression on her composed child-lips. It was plainly a challenge or an invitation to push: while Marjorie, on the contrary, would spring with her light deer-bound whenever she saw the beautiful dark woman approaching; and no eyes, except Gertrude's, watched Mrs. Vaughn so intently as hers. Oh, the inflexible dignity of soft childhood! How its secret wounds endure into far-off distant years. As long as they lived, Edith and Marjorie never forgot or quite forgave the presumption of that push.

Aunt Serena spoke now and then with this beautiful guest. The kind soul was glad things were going so well, and was grateful to Sydney for his quiet assistance, and proud of Rose's tact and courtesy. "The Lennoxes were always hospitable," she thought, with gentle pride of race. She was rather tired, having made many preparations herself. She was pleased that the evening had been a success; so friendly and homelike in spite

of its contradictory elements. Yes, if the truth were known, she was very tired. Perhaps she missed the sea-air, now that warm weather was coming: she felt rather dull. Fortunately, nothing more was required of her but to chat with Lady Manners, who was always unexciting. But she was glad it had all been so pleasant for dear Rosamond. For once the watchful eyes were weary. But Gertrude was on guard — and the poplars.

The musicians played merrily on. All the windows were open. The June night, while not oppressive, was still and dark, and heavy with sweet odors. The children had been sent safely home. The older guests lingered. The young people danced in the long *salon*. Like the mignonette the night before, even staid Lady Manners felt enthusiastic. "Dear Miss Lennox, what have you done to us?" she asked.

"It is the power of this strange, high spot, perhaps," aunt Serena answered. "But is there not always a delight in feeling one's self out of the even row of mankind? I have accidentally discovered that I appreciate a symphony concert inexpressibly more if I can hear it in an airy corridor or anteroom where I can move, rather than in the crowded lines of human beings."

And Lady Manners, representative of lines and rows, listened with pleasure and amiable concurrence. It must, as aunt Serena suggested, have been owing to the genius of the place.

The young people danced on. Sometimes, in an

interval of rest, Gertrude's voice floated out from the height, so strong, so sweet, so inspired, it seemed as if its impassioned echoes would never die. Rose sang too, little wayward, tender folk-songs; and her pure voice crept into every heart.

"Unless I can fairly get at him, this is all quite fruitless," reflected Eleanor. "He always had two souls. One is soaring now beyond me. If I can reach the other, there is hope. If not, there is — the Tyrol." Upon which her smile was so seductively sweet that von Falkenstein thought, — but it was only a fleeting fancy in his thrifty, well-regulated brain, — "what matters the estate and dull little Olga?" The musicians, as an interlude between the waltzes, played the "Bridal Chorus" from "Lohengrin."

Rosamond never lost for one moment her happy, assured air. Whether she were enduring any hard strain or not, only Gertrude knew; for aunt Serena was weary, and Sydney was — a man: and there are moments when a woman turns from love itself to the comprehensive, restful understanding of another woman.

At the end of a long corridor the villa had a small heart-shaped room, with mirrors set in the walls. What its especial purpose had been in the old Tarnorowowski days, they had often wondered. It might have been a boudoir. It might be pretty for birds, Rose thought. But it was not a room where aunt Serena and the young girls liked to stay, since its mirror-walls had the effect of presenting an inter-

minable series of reflections. The Tarnorowowskis must have had a passionate interest in curious effects in the refraction of light, they concluded.

"Come to me in the glass-room as soon as you can. I want to see you one instant alone," Bruce had whispered to Rose during her pretty solicitude for her guests.

Eleanor saw the quick, glad look of assent as Bruce went back to turn Miss Van Rensalaer's music; while Rose continued her conversation with the one lieutenant who was able to withstand the intoxication of Mrs. Vaughn's presence.

"If I go out on the long veranda, I shall see in which room they go, or if they are in the garden, and shall not be seen if I keep in the shadow. I know when Sydney's eyes say come. I do not want in the least to interrupt their *tête-à-tête*, but I must see Cid alone. How amusing it is to be the original volume of a romance of which they are now preparing a kind of weak, expurgated edition!" Her smiling mouth disclosed its small, milk-white teeth; and her lovely eyes looked warm and kind. She rose, scattering the lieutenants. She saw that Bruce was not in the room. "Let us stand by that window," she said to von Falkenstein, "where the breeze comes in from the garden. It is a warm night; but delicious, is it not?" with a slow lifting of her tropical gaze. Von Falkenstein thought that it was. She was enjoying herself fairly well this evening. Certain phases of it were vividly entertaining. She never felt resentment, jealousy, or irritation. This

gave her undeniable advantage in all games of chance. If any thing was in her way, she pushed it gently aside, or crushed it with her soft, slow foot.

From the window she observed the room. Bruce was still absent. In the next room there were two tables of whist. She could see Raymond strenuously disputing a point with Mrs. Van Rensalaer, and the others listening with amused attention. She saw Rose steal to the door leading into the corridor. Kitty Van Rensalaer called her. "O Rose! please come, and sing '*Gretelein.*'" — "In one moment." — "Now, please, before the next waltz." Rose came back to sing the little song. What did it matter, — a moment more or less? She was supremely happy. She was glad to sing, to do any thing to oblige anybody. She trusted herself. She was no longer oppressed by the consciousness of Sydney's past. This Mrs. Vaughn was very beautiful. She seemed kind too. But Rose did not fear her more than she feared the magnificent summer sunset upon which Sydney had turned his back to gaze at her. She came brightly back, then, and sang.

Mrs. Vaughn stepped out on the veranda. The climbing roses clustered around her. No one observed her except von Falkenstein and Gertrude, whose cold, critical eyes said, "What now, you handsome panther?" The abandoned lieutenants, with an assumption of returning manliness, grouped themselves about the piano.

"Oh, my vinaigrette!" murmured the beautiful woman.

Von Falkenstein stooped to look for it.

"I must have dropped it round there under the poplars. It is a little thing, but I prize it for its associations. I have had it since I was a child," she said with touching though mild regret.

She had bought it the week before, as a good bargain, to use in the cars. It reposed securely in the depths of her pocket.

"I will find it for you surely," said the kind-hearted young man. "May I leave you here?"

"Don't stay too long," murmured the beauty, "or I shall come to help search."

Von Falkenstein flew to the poplars.

"She is safe," thought Gertrude. "No one cares how much she flirts with von Falkenstein, for he will be none the worse for it. He is India rubber. Where is Mr. Bruce? Never mind. He can take care of himself. I'll stay by Rose."

Eleanor's garments trailed softly the whole length of the veranda. She looked in every window of the long *suite*. She came to the end, where a small room was dimly lighted, and a man stood, his profile turned towards her, facing the corridor. "*Sei hübsch meine Braut*," sang Rose's tender little voice in the distance. She pushed the casement noiselessly, passed in, and laid her hand on his shoulder. He started, with a look of unconcealed disgust on his face, that left her in no doubt as to the probabilities of her success. "This is still more amusing," she thought in her good-natured way. "Oh, my handsome, fickle Sydney! What a contrast between then and now."

"At last! At last!" she murmured in accents of unrestrained tenderness.

"Mrs. Vaughn," said Bruce with icy coldness, "you have apparently mistaken the room and the person. Allow me to show you the way back."

"I'll take the first train for the Tyrol to-morrow," resolved Eleanor, with humorous appreciation of the scene.

But acting was to her like the breath of life.

"Have you forgotten the dear old days? O Sydney! tell me, have you forgotten?" Her voice was low and rich with tender emotion.

He stood before her drawn up to his full height.

"I have forgotten," he said with magnificent inconsequence, and stern emphasis on every syllable. "I have forgotten every day and hour and word I ever knew with you."

"Now, Jack Cushing could never have said that," she thought, with artistic enjoyment of the man's dignity. The Tyrol for the moment assumed a less attractive hue. "After all, Sydney is but human. Men relent, swearing they will not." Her senses were as acute as her morals were obtuse. She had the hearing of a wild thing of the woods. A light, swift step was coming down the corridor.

"Oh, call me Eleanor once more!" she cried passionately, throwing herself upon his breast, clasping him close with her jasmine-scented arms; and Rose's happy, hurrying feet stopped short near the threshold. Ah, the fatal Tarnorowowski mirrors! They gave back the cruel vision, not once, but in an

innumerable mocking series. Dim yet distinct, impossible yet actual, a man and a woman, lovers, reaching down into inconceivably remote space, haunting all time.

One instant, — then the girl turned, and went back towards the dancers. Faithful Gertrude met her on the way.

"Rose, Rose! What is it?"

The stunned, vacant look left her eyes.

"Let us dance," she said, and laughed; but her laugh made Gertrude faint with fear.

In the heart-shaped room, Sydney Bruce had unwound the clinging arms with deliberate force. A mighty scorn convulsed him, scorn of her, scorn of himself, that she had ever enchained him.

"A gentleman does not use strength against a woman, Sydney," said Eleanor Vaughn, smiling, and looking at her wrists. "Really, the years have not improved your manners."

He looked at her, and turned to leave the room. His contempt was too profound for words, but it was for himself also.

"O Sydney dear!" she called with languid *insouciance*, "don't let us make scenes under granny Lennox's roof. How shall I look strolling in after you, pensive, neglected, and alone? Take me in. That's a dear. Not that I care on my own account. It's only my good nature, my care for others. Let us go in together. Two old friends like us. What is more natural?"

He turned again, and looked at her. His face was coldly gentle.

He even smiled, but the smile was for his own thoughts. "Pardon, oh, pardon, my perfect Rose!"

"You are right, Mrs. Vaughn," he said formally. "Allow me," offering his arm. She was not worth resentment. Silence was too dignified a tribute to offer her.

They passed in among the dancers. She had assumed a significant, over-sweet, conscious look. It was as if she had been listening to some tender revelation. Gertrude hated her. She even at the moment hated Sydney. But she saw his eyes follow Rose as she danced a fast and furious galop. "Let us go till the music stops," she had said to her partner.

Gertrude saw him draw a long, slow breath as of relief. She saw thankfulness in every line of his face. "He is true. He is pure gold. But what is making my poor Rose mad?" And she looked instinctively for aunt Serena. She was placidly playing old-fashioned whist in the next room. "She is very weary. Oh! what shall I do to help Rose?"

Eleanor, with an ecstatic lieutenant, sauntered out to find von Falkenstein. The devoted young man was down on all-fours under the poplars, beating the grass with his hands.

"I am so sorry!" she said sweetly. "I have found the vinaigrette. "It was on the veranda, after all."

"We really must go, dear Miss Lennox," said Lady Manners. "It is not very late, I believe; but you make us forget that some of us have been here

since four o'clock, and that we have a drive of nearly an hour."

The little company was soon making its adieus. Rosamond was so much occupied with her young friends that she had not a moment or a glance for Bruce. This naturally did not disturb him. He was neither very young, nor a madly impatient lover. He quietly wondered why she had not come to the glass-room; but was rather glad, as things had happened, that something had detained her.

The people all went together, and the family stood informally on the porch as the carriages drove up. It was a pleasant scene. Rose was unusually gay. Occasionally Bruce spent the night at the Poplars to be able to ride with the young girls in the early morning. It was understood that he was to remain to-night. His horse was in the stable. The Raymonds were already gone, and all the others, except Mrs. Vaughn and the lieutenants. As her carriage drove up, and she was saying her last charming words to the ladies, Rosamond said clearly in a decisive tone, —

"Aunt Serena, we ought not to let Mrs. Vaughn, a stranger, drive home so late alone. Mr. Bruce, will you not drive down with Mrs. Vaughn?"

"She is jealous. She is madly jealous," thought Eleanor.

"You are so considerate, Miss Wellesley; although I should have suffered in silence without your kind intervention. I am a little timid," said the beautiful woman, leaning back indolently against the

cushions, the bright light from the entrance falling on her lustrous eyes looking out of a bewitching cloud of black lace.

"Mr. Bruce," said Rose with a smile, and a polite little wave of her hand towards the carriage-door. The other hand, which she held behind her, was tightly clinched; but only Gertrude saw.

Bruce stood like a stone image. He was thunderstruck. Rose always said Mr. Bruce when she called him by any formal name at all. But she had never said it like this. Nor did aunt Serena understand. Puzzled, she began hesitatingly,—

"Of course, if Mrs. Vaughn is timid" —

"Pray allow me," and von Falkenstein advanced eagerly. "If I may escort madame" —

Mrs. Vaughn lay back smiling, and enjoying the dilemma. "Really," she thought, "I would not have believed there was so much spirit in the child. If I had any one to bet with, any one who has any appreciation of a joke, I'd wager two dozen Bertins that she'll win. Nobody else has the shadow of a chance. How deliciously furious Sydney is!"

Rose came swiftly down the three steps, and stood by the gentlemen. With a smile for von Falkenstein, she said, as if etiquette were the law of her life, —

"Mr. Bruce must have the honor this evening, Herr Lieutenant, as it is from our house, you know; and Mrs. Vaughn is our guest."

This was incontrovertible. Von Falkenstein bowed with entire submission.

There seemed to be no appeal, but Bruce waited.

"Is my little Rose gone mad?" he thought.

"I am always, as you know, at your orders," he said with light and significant emphasis, looking Rose, who stood near him, earnestly in the face.

"Now, he needn't pretend it's a hardship to go down with that superb woman," thought the lieutenants, one and all.

"Yes, I know," Rose answered with a strange little laugh.

"You wish this?" he said, careless of the others.

"I wish it."

He deliberately took the place opposite Mrs. Vaughn. "I regret to disappoint you, von Falkenstein," he said.

"Patience till to-morrow," he thought. "As for this woman, I can drive with her in the darkest night to the end of the world, if Rose and fate ordain."

The carriage rolled slowly from the door.

"Now, Sydney, smoke and be social," said the low, laughing voice. "You are in a ludicrous position, you know; but you'll make it more absurd if you sit there in utter silence, with a face as black as the night."

"Thanks, Mrs. Vaughn. Since you permit me," taking out his cigar-case.

Gertrude was desperate. It had been impossible for her to say one private word to Bruce; but she thought, if she did not, Rose would go mad, or die. "Are they all blind? Do they not see her eyes?"

"Mr. Bruce!" she called out clear and loud.

The carriage stopped.

"Wait, please."

She ran in, tore a fly-leaf from a book, and wrote, "Come back, come instantly back, at any hour. Something is breaking Rose's heart, and she does not tell us."

She hurried down the drive with the paper in her hand. "It is something I want Mr. Bruce to bring," she explained.

"To-morrow morning?" he asked, as he laid it carefully in his pocket-book.

"As soon as you find it convenient," she said, her eyes looking daggers at Mrs. Vaughn, her voice instinct with strong, latent meaning.

"Actually another one! How well she does it! Both so young too! I am indebted to Alice for a most entertaining evening. She shall dine well to-morrow."

Mrs. Vaughn was one of those women who would give a photograph-book filled with views of herself at different stages of her beauty to girls of eighteen and twenty, as she would give a rattle to a baby; and, having discharged her social duty, considering the means of entertainment adequate, would take her *siesta* in their presence. She rarely wasted a thought on them.

"Good-night again, Miss Peyton," she said cordially.

Gertrude bowed haughtily, without speaking.

Again the carriage rolled away.

"Delicious! Inimitable! Sydney, I'm glad you deign to smoke: it looks more *gemüthlich*. That is what the Germans call it, is it not? Those little girls up there are very gallant little fighters. They have managed things quite prettily."

"Mrs. Vaughn," said Sydney civilly, "you would oblige me very much if you would kindly refrain in my presence from remarks about any and all of my friends. With this slight condition, I am at your service as escort. Otherwise I shall stop the carriage, and get out."

"You would, I am sure you would!" she said with intense amusement. "You are tyrannical, my dear; but I yield, being amiable. Only one word in your own interest, — don't fail to read that pale and wrathful child's missive before morning. I advise you to read it by the first lamp-post. Perhaps the carriage-lamps would be sufficient. It is not a list of books, Cid. Mark my words, and I am an experienced woman. Now, to change the subject. I want to tell you, knowing so old a friend will be glad to congratulate me, that I am engaged to be married to Jack Cushing. That is, he considers it an engagement. I am always more or less incredulous about such things, and have been waiting for the latest advices. I have now, however, nearly concluded that it is an actual engagement;" and she laughed softly, and drew her lace well round her throat. "Of course, this made our bit of comedy to-night the more delectable. You lack humor, Sydney, if you cannot appreciate it. They say few women

are endowed with humor. But I honestly think it's the men who have none. They often are stolid and dull, when every fine point of a situation is exquisitely humorous, and appeals most irresistibly to me. Have you never thought of this? No? But why so laconic? Just imagine me a good-natured man in the corner of a railway *coupé*, and then you will be more entertaining.

So the sweet, insolent voice drawled out its edifying philosophy as the carriage went down the hill in the soft. dark, June night. "Your pardon, my little Rose, that I ever loved this woman!" was always Bruce's thought. "Drive fast," he said to the coachman; and to her, indifferently, —

"Cushing is in Austria, is he not? I believe some one told me he was in Vienna."

At the villa all the guests were gone, and the servants were putting out the lights.

"It has been pleasant, has it not, children? Everybody was so kind. And it is not late, only a little after eleven; although it seems later, we began so early. I think I won't sit up to talk it over to-night, however; as I feel rather fatigued. It is not my eighteenth birthday, you know. Good-night, dear children. Is my Rose quite happy?" asked the weary little old lady.

"Quite," said Rose, kissing her.

"That is the first untruth that ever passed her lips, and it is delirium," thought Gertrude.

Aunt Serena went to her pleasant room over the porch. It was cool and fresh and fragrant. The

casement opened towards the rose-garden. "I am blessed," she thought, "blessed in my friends, and in my children's happiness. It has been a full and beautiful year for my happy little girl." Soon she slept peacefully.

The young girls occupied adjoining rooms.

"Good-night, Gertrude," said Rose. "It has been delightful, has it not?" Her voice had a dry, hard intonation. She was pale as death, and in her eyes was the look Gertrude feared.

"Do you want me for any thing, Rose?" she said timidly.

"No, thanks."

"There is nothing you would like to talk about? I thought perhaps you were not sleepy. I am not, if you want me." She knew she was awkward; but she did not know how to approach her friend, mortally wounded, yet holding herself erect in her indomitable pride.

Rose laughed.

"I have nothing to talk about. What should I have? It has been a pleasant evening, has it not? And I am eighteen, am I not? Then, we have said all. Good-night, Gertrude. Sleep well." She kissed her mechanically, and closed the door of her room.

"As fast as he can come, for life or death, it will be an hour and a half before he can be here. O Rose, my pretty Rose! What did you see? What did you hear?"

And Gertrude, who never wasted tears on her own

troubles, threw herself on her bed in a paroxysm of silent grief. In the next room she heard Rose's incessant, rapid step. Up and down, up and down, like a caged thing. She sat motionless. She had turned out her light. "Rose need not know I am listening. No one can help — only he. Even if aunt Serena were not tired, she could not help, to-night. Oh, I am sure it must be a frightful mistake. Yet he went out to meet her; and then, her beautiful, evil face!"

A half-hour passed. Always the steps. Then Rose's door softly opened.

"Oh, what is she going to do? Is she quite mad?"

But Rose was not mad. She was merely miserable. Softly, that she might not waken aunt Serena or Gertrude, she stole down the stairway. She opened one of the long windows, stepped out, and disappeared in the darkness. Behind her, noiseless, not in sight, Gertrude followed like a faithful hound.

The night was intensely dark, — no moonlight, no starlight. A warm, soft, strong wind stirred the languid roses and the poplar leaves and the great, gloomy woods across the way.

Rose lay motionless upon the ground.

Do other women feel like this? Then, what do they do? Do they die? A revelation of the woe of the whole woman-world had suddenly opened itself before her. She had felt only the innocent rapture of love, the sunny love that had known no sorrow, the love of a child. Where was the Rose who had

been singing her little song an hour before? The Rose that laughed and danced? Foolish, happy Rose, so light of heart, so fearless, so content. And who was this trembling, stricken thing prostrate in the damp grass below pale Hermes? She shuddered, and clasped the cold stone closer, then lay motionless as a broken flower.

Hermes looked down upon her with his lovely, pitying, speculative, faint smile. The uneasy poplars sighed incessantly. "So useless! So useless!" The warm wind kissed her pale cheek; and the soft, dark night covered her misery. In the great woods were strange, deep murmurs. Dear aunt Serena slept. Gertrude crouched by the porch.

"Oh, my love, my love, if it had been any thing but this!" moaned the child. "If they had accused you of a great crime — if all the world had blamed you — I would not have believed you guilty. I would not have believed this, had any one sworn it was true. Not Gertrude. Not aunt Serena herself. Not an angel from heaven. I would have said they were dreaming. But I saw you with my own eyes. I saw you." She buried them in the cool grass, but could not shut out the picture and all its multiplied reflections in those ghastly Tarnorowowski mirrors. "I saw her on your breast. I heard her voice as she spoke to you, — my Sydney. Oh, you need not have come to me! You need not have taught me to love you. I was content with aunt Serena. You need not have looked at me so, the night we heard 'Lohengrin.' You need not have

kissed me that lovely Christmas Eve. You need not have been so kind, so beautiful, so strong, so dear!

"And if you had told me you loved her, I could have borne it better. She is so wonderful and beautiful. I am so very young, so simple for a man like you. But you could have trusted me with any thing. And now, there is no help. I saw you. I have lost you!"

And Hermes smiled his faint, wise smile; and the poplars whispered, "Useless!" and aunt Serena slept, and Gertrude kept watch.

What was calming Rose? Was it the cool dews of the nature she loved? Was it the strong, soft, warm, slow wind? Was it the mystery of the woods, — the prophecy of the poplars?

Her poor head ceased its wild throbbing. But still she lay motionless, clasping the pedestal of the subtly-smiling, fair Greek god.

Down in the valley the city-clocks were striking twelve. She raised her head, and listened, as one, in times of grief, is often apt to listen to familiar sounds, with mechanical attention. She heard first the great, sturdy tower-clock. Then the others in order. She counted all the strokes. The Hospital-Church clock, always slow, was slower than ever before. She waited for it. Then the other tower-clock. Then the silver midnight-bell. Gertrude, too, heard them all, and counted every stroke. "He is on his way!" she thought.

Ah, the sweet, solemn bell! While Rose lived, she

never forgot how it rang out to her that night, over the silent, sleeping city. How its oft-repeated, emphatic two strokes, the second stronger and longer than the first, spoke to her with their high and holy message. "*Have faith! Have faith! Have faith!*" sang the warning silver voice in the midnight stillness. And again, "*Have faith! Have faith!*" fainter and slower until it died away. But up to the heights, up to the sorrowful, loving child-heart floated its noble counsel.

How white Hermes smiled! And the tallest of the seven great poplars, the one Rose had leaned upon, and clasped with her glad young arms in the early morning, whispered, "Brothers, I see him! The swift feet of his horses are already upon the hill." There was joy among the poplars and laughter in their leaves. The strong, warm wind breathed upon her upturned, listening face; and the dark, soft night bent over the kneeling figure.

An ineffable solemn smile was on her lips.

"Now I know I have not lost you. I have you still, — to love. I was mad and wicked. Forgive me, Sydney. I am so young for you, and I did not understand; but now I know. If they had doubted you in the city-streets, it would have been easy to be true. If you had asked me to be silent, or to speak, it would have been nothing to do your will. How could I think I could determine what trial would come? How could I dream it must come to me just as it came to poor Elsa? I was a child. But I promised you faith. Ah! this is what I promised

when I looked into your eyes that night, — not to doubt whatever came. And I do not, I do not."

She rose, and pushed back her damp, falling hair. "Thanks, little bell! Once you led a wandering princess home through dark woods, on these very hills. I think I am slowly finding my way; but it is not easy, Sydney dear! I saw with my own eyes; but this is my trial, just this. I will not ask what it means. I will not speak. I think you love me, dear; and if I do not understand quite, why, you are different. You are a strong, wise man: you know, if I do not, why that woman was on your breast;" and one brave sob broke the stillness. "And if you want me still, I am your own. And if you do not, I can love you and be faithful. This is what I promised in your eyes that night. To be faithful, not only in spite of shadows and suspicions, — poor Elsa, they did not give you time! — but in spite of what I see with my own eyes, and hear with my own ears, and know, — know with my own heart, though it break with the knowing!"

"I *saw*, Sydney!"

And she opened wide her soul-eyes, and looked boldly at the mocking multitude of visions in the old Tarnorowowski mirrors.

Ah, how inscrutably Hermes smiled!

"He is almost here," whispered the night-wind.

"If we could but tell her — tell her!" sighed the poplars.

Rose stood still by the statue. All seemed clear

to her. The night had brought counsel. She was strong, though sorrowful. She had fought one of the great battles of life; she had striven with an enemy which most loving women, sooner or later, must encounter.

"I am a woman now," she said. There was a great sadness in her heart. It seemed long ages since the happy morning. But she was wild and desperate no longer. She stood in the tender darkness, and thought.

There was a sound on the road. A carriage coming fast up the long slopes. "How fast it comes!" she thought. She did not know it was coming to her — to her, through the night.

It stopped an instant just below the cross-roads. Then turned, and went slowly down the hill. The panting horses could now take breath. The gate swung open. Rose started violently. "Only Sydney has that step."

He came straight to the porch. A white figure met him with outstretched, trembling hands. "She is there, by the Hermes," whispered Gertrude. Without a word, he strode on in the darkness.

Rose was waiting in rapturous doubt. She sprang towards him.

"Sydney! O Sydney!" she cried, and lifted her innocent arms, and clasped him close.

Ah! what were mocking mirrors, beautiful women, — the whole world beside, now?

He held her in his strong embrace, as if she had been restored to him from danger or from death.

He kissed the dews from her hair, the sorrow from her eyes.

"My little love! My poor little Rose! What is she doing here all alone in the dark night? So cold — cold, lovely lips, cold, dear hands;" and his smile, shadowy in the darkness, was as sweet as Hermes' own, — ah, sweeter! for his warm human arms were enfolding her; and his loving, eager, true voice was whispering comfort to her soul.

"Dear heart, you thought"—

"Hush, Sydney: I think nothing."

"It was not true," he said with tender, solemn triumph. "Nothing is true except that I love you, my Rose!"

The poplars breathed their happy sighs out upon the soft, strong, warm night-wind; and pale, sweet Hermes smiled divinely as the lovers walked on through the dark, fragrant garden.

Gertrude was waiting on the porch. They drew near with fervent, thankful words. But standing like the small child-god of silence who holds a wise warning finger to his merry lips, — her fair face shining with pure, unselfish joy, —

"Softly," she said. For aunt Serena slept.



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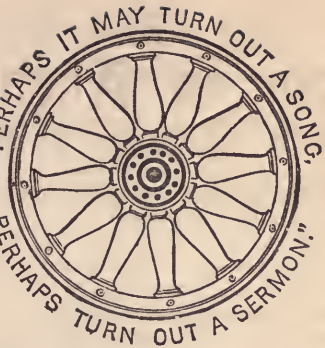
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